RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RtI) AND PROMISING PRACTICES: WHAT WORKS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

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The primary focus of RtI has been at the elementary school level. However, over the past few years there has been a shift, and RtI has been expanding to secondary schools. Through this expansion, it is unclear if RtI has been effectively implemented at the secondary level. The ultimate goal for any school implementing change is institutionalization or sustainability. Therefore, this qualitative case study examined the institutionalization or sustainability of RtI systems in one high school. This study was designed to deepen the understanding of secondary RtI and to add to the literature on RtI at the secondary level. The purpose was to understand how one secondary school addressed the complexity and uniqueness of the secondary environment while sustaining RtI practices. The participants in this study shared several research-based practices that they believed assisted struggling students to become academically successful. The findings regarding RtI practices and implementation were supported by researchers whose works were analyzed in the literature review. The study concluded that understanding the phases of change, the three major forces which influenced change and a clear, well thought out plan are vital components to success.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Changes in the federal special education law reconceptualized the process that educators may use to identify a student with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). This change in focus has empowered Local Education Agencies (LEA) to examine whether one or more high-quality research-based interventions positively affect a student's progress towards learning. With the reauthorization of the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), one of the requirements of educators is to provide instructional support to all students who struggle and to document the effectiveness of the strategies implemented with identified students (IDEIA, 2004). Schools across the United States (U.S.) adopted a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) approach to contend with the specific learning challenges certain students may encounter, designed to improve the academic success of students. The Response to Intervention (RtI) framework serves as one of the more commonly used systems of supports.

In the U.S., educators are faced with significant legislative mandates to improve the academic skills of students (Windram & Bollman, 2011). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, also known as Public Law (PL) 94-142, were significant in supporting states by protecting the rights, meeting the needs, and improving the educational results for children and youth with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), 2006). Before EAHCA, there was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of the "War on Poverty." ESEA required equal access to education for all students and provided funding for disadvantaged students (University of Kansas School of Education, 2017). However, in 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA), which renamed EAHCA and amended PL 94-142. This Act had several key changes, one of which provided all students with access to the same curriculum. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), which reauthorized ESEA of 1965. IASA supported four essential elements: (a) high standards for all students, (b) better trained teachers, (c) flexibility of local reform and accountability for results, and (d) partnerships among stakeholders. In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 which replaced ESEA and required states to develop a state assessment to test students' basic skills. Additionally, in 2004, President George W. Bush and Congress amended IDEA to what is now known as IDEIA of 2004, which called for early intervention and greater accountability. It raised standards for teachers who teach special education classes and demanded a shift in funding toward general education if a disproportionate number of minority students were placed in special education for any reason other than having a true disability. In February 2009, President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), known as the Recovery Act, which addressed four areas for LEAs:

1. Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader;
2. Providing information to families to assist them in evaluating and improving their children's schools, and to educators to help them improve their students' learning;
3. Implement college-and-career-ready standards and develop improved assessments aligned with those standards; and
4. Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions. (USDOE, 2010, p. 3)

On March 23, 2010, President Barack Obama signed the revised ESEA which built upon the significant reforms of the ARRA of 2009. His plan challenged the U.S. to embrace educational standards that would put America on a path to global leadership. The revision

provided incentives for states to adopt new academic standards for preparing students to succeed in college and the workplace. Furthermore, it created an accountability system that measured student growth toward meeting the goal of all children (African American Voices in Congress [Avoice], n.d.).

Finally, in December 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to replace NCLB (Klein, 2015). ESSA goes into full effect in the 2017-2018 school year. Unlike NCLB which scaled up the federal role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes, ESSA will do the opposite; it will pare back the federal role in education. Germane to the reforms mentioned above is the growing attention to increase academic success for all populations. Therefore, this study focused on one model which contributes to that effort RtI.

Response to Intervention Background

Since 1977, the identification of students with learning disabilities (LD) has increased more than 200%. Approximately 2.4 million students are diagnosed with a specific learning disability (SLD); 75%-80% of special education students are identified as LD in language and reading, and 60% of adults have undetected or untreated learning disabilities (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2017). In 2004, when Congress reauthorized IDEA, it allowed the local education agencies to discontinue the use of the IQ-Achievement discrepancy approach. RtI replaced its use and became an integral part of the evaluation procedures to document the use of specific instructional strategies and interventions prior to determining whether a student should be referred for testing to determine if a student experiencing learning difficulties might be eligible for special education and related services, due to being identified as a student with an SLD (Bender & Shores, 2007). The intent

of the change was to reduce the number of students being identified for special education as evidenced in the prevailing statistics. Thus, the RtI framework emerged as an alternative process to follow prior to identifying a student with a disability and determining eligibility for special education and related services under IDEIA (2004).

One consequence of the pre-2004 IDEA was the over- and under-identification of African American and Hispanic students in special education (Hintze, 2008), many of whom have undiagnosed or unaddressed learning disabilities (Mierzwik, 2013), leaving these students in the classroom to struggle, fall behind, and ultimately fail if no interventions are put into place. Furthermore, 44% of parents who noticed their child struggling with learning waited a year or more before acknowledging their child might have a serious problem. Other consequences, based on the IQ-Achievement discrepancy approach, were deemed to violate IDEIA (2004) by not providing students an education in the least restrictive environment. This led educators to determine that some students may be in need of additional instructional interventions in the classroom to help them succeed, regardless of whether they had been identified with a learning disability.

Keep in mind that with the 2004 IDEIA reauthorization, Congress shifted responsibility from special education to the general education classroom. More specifically, the general education teacher was expected to monitor, observe, and document the progress of students involved in RtI while teaching the general curriculum to all students (USDOE, 2006). A provision in the reauthorized 2004 IDEIA included a special rule (exclusionary factors) stating that students should not be determined to be children with disabilities if the factors for determination were due to: (a) a lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including the essential components of reading; (b) a lack of appropriate instruction in math; or (c) limited

proficiency in English (USDOE, 2006). In addition, the special rule ensured that eligibility determination was based on the founding principles of RtI: (a) students are provided with high quality, research-based instruction in reading and math, and (b) students are given time and instruction to acquire proficient English language skills before each is labeled as a student who has a disability (USDOE, 2006). Therefore, the onus of intervention and monitoring was placed on the general education classroom teacher.

Theoretical Framework

> Change is messy. Michael Fullan (2003) argues that since change is often a lot to ask of people we need powerful social attractors. That is, if people genuinely feel they are being asked to do something that is laudable and worthwhile they are more likely to be better motivated and put in extra effort to help achieve success. This he calls 'moral purpose.' (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2017, para. 1)

Fullan's (2017) change theory is the theoretical framework that guided this case study. This theory is rooted in the basic concepts of organizational reform and is perhaps the most influential theory of educational transformation. Fullan has been writing about the meaning of educational modification for more than 40 years. According to the Center for Theory of Change (2016), change theory is:

> . . . a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or "filling in" what has been described as the "missing middle" between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. (para. 4)

Fullan (2007) offers a simple model for understanding a complex process and states that change occurs in three phases: (a) initiate the innovation, (b) implement the innovation, and (c) institutionalize the innovation. He simplifies the change process by mapping it out with an

outline of the phases which loop around outcomes categorized as either “student learning” or “organizational capacity” (Fullan, 2001, p. 51).

Within the first phase of initiation, those who are leading the change generally pay close attention to how the innovation is presented. Leaders who are implementing any type of change recognize that “how well something begins affects how it ends” (Learning Forward, 2017, p. 21). Within this phase, leaders must engage educators and sell them on how this innovation will affect both them, as the educator, and their students. In addition, leaders also characterize results in terms of student achievement and adjust existing procedures to support the innovation.

The second phase of implementation is the process of putting the change into practice. Within this phase, the change is adopted and becomes more complex because it “involves more people and real change is at stake” (Fullan, 2001, p. 70). In other words, the change is no longer a thought; it turns into reality. Inside of this phase, a critical part of implementation is giving constructive and supportive feedback and continuous opportunities for educators to refine their practice and improve results. It must also be noted that feedback and ongoing professional development are the essential means for developing clear and predictable understanding, desires, and practices related to the innovation. It is crucial that leaders continuously set clear and consistent expectations to minimize confusion and inconsistency as well as promote implementation with frequency, regularity, and accuracy to produce intended results (Learning Forward, 2017).

The end-result objective of the change theory is institutionalization, the third phase of the theory. Unfortunately, institutionalization will not occur if the change has not been effectively initiated and fully implemented. Within the cycle of phases, each phase depends on the prior phase’s success, and each phase requires different strategies. “Institutionalization means that the

new practices are routine for everyone responsible for implementing them and that the practices lead to the intended results" (Learning Forward, 2017, p. 19). Until that time, the change is not fully actualized. Fullan's (2017) change theory is the theoretical framework that guided this case study. Although the school that was examined was past the initial phase, this study concentrated on their implementation and institutionalization phases.

Statement of the Problem

With RtI, schools no longer have to wait for students to fail to get the help they need. RtI embraces the potential to (a) identify students with SLDs earlier and more reliably, (b) reduce the number of students who are referred inappropriately to special education, and (c) reduce the over identification of minority students placed in special education (Hintze, 2008; Knestrick, 2012). Elementary schools have used RtI for years, with a primary focus to develop the student's capacity to read, write, and perform mathematics at a level that will enable them to be more successful in a secondary setting (Quinn, 2015). Secondary students who enter high school without strong basic academic skills are at risk for learning problems across several academic areas, due to a shift from learning to read and write to being able to use their reading and writing skills to learn the content (Johnson, Smith, & Harris, 2009). Due to the increasing number of students entering the secondary level who are ill-prepared to meet these demands, teachers are finding their traditional approach to teaching is not effective, thereby motivating them to look for alternative ways to meet the needs of students.

According to Brown-Chidsey (2007), RtI is a data-based, systematic process that supports equitable educational access for all students. It provides administrators and teachers ways of identifying at-risk students and provides immediate data that inform their efforts toward

closing learning gaps. RtI purportedly ensures that the general education classroom is providing effective instruction and assessment for all students. Other claims attributed to RtI include the belief that RtI helps to bridge gaps between general and special education services by providing research-based interventions quickly and efficiently for all students who need additional support. Successful implementation of RtI strategies at the elementary or secondary setting take place when strategies include high-quality, research-based classroom instruction; on-going student assessment; tiered instruction; and parental involvement (RtI Action Network, n.d.a, n.d.b). Yet, in secondary schools, educators have fallen short in their decision to use RtI as a procedure for providing quality instruction and monitoring student progress in the classroom.

RtI has changed the way education is perceived; however, some may view RtI as adding something new or perceive RtI as some type of new program. RtI should not be viewed as another educational fad; it is not a product, intervention, or program. Instead, RtI should be viewed as a way to bring structure and a common language to practices that already exist in our schools (Windram & Bollman, 2011). Systemic processes in RtI can provide high-quality, research-based instruction; frequent monitoring of learning using data; teachers working in professional learning communities (PLC) to plan how to teach, what to teach, and when to teach; and a school-wide infrastructure to support all processes (Windram & Bollman, 2011). We must now ask, how does or should RtI look at the secondary level? According to Quinn (2015), RtI looks differently at the secondary school level than it does at the elementary school level. The premise behind secondary RtI is that RtI needs to be implemented in a way that fits the secondary schedule, the secondary teacher's student load, and the limits of a secondary school system.

Through the reauthorization of IDEIA (2004), policy makers have stated that the Department of Education will govern how states and public agencies identify and provide early interventions for struggling students. The problem is that many school-level teachers and administrators may not have the tools necessary to know what to do with a student who has been identified as a struggling learner. While numerous studies have been conducted to validate the specific features of RtI, studies should evaluate the effectiveness of various models or approaches (Hughes & Dexter, 2013; Torgeson, 2009; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007). In the area of early reading skills, available evidence indicates that the use of RtI models can improve the academic performance of at-risk students (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2009). Data have also suggested that RtI approaches not only prevent academic failure, but also improve academic outcomes for students (Ardoin, Witt, Connell, & Koenig, 2005; McInerney & Elledge, 2013). Other studies have shown that students who were involved in programs employing RtI models were less likely to be referred to special education, placed in special education, or they performed better on academic behaviors, such as time-on-task and task completion (Fox et al., 2009). This study aims to examine how RtI practices are institutionalized at the secondary level.

Purpose of the Study

The primary focus of RtI has been at the elementary school level. However, over the past few years there has been a shift, and RtI has been expanding to secondary schools. Through this expansion, it is unclear if RtI has been effectively implemented at the secondary level (Ogonosky, 2009b; Quinn, 2015; RtI Action Network, n.d.a, n.d.b). The ultimate goal for any school implementing change is institutionalization or sustainability. Specifically, this means

"that the new practices are routine for everyone responsible for implementing them and that the practices lead to the intended results" (Learning Forward, 2017, p. 19). Until this is achieved, the change is not fully actualized. Therefore, this case study examined the implementation of RtI in one high school. This study was designed to deepen the understanding of secondary RtI and how a school is able to sustain RtI schoolwide. This qualitative study focused on one high school that was in the institutionalized phase.

Research Questions

The proposed qualitative case study aimed to extend the understanding of how RtI is sustained at the secondary level. As a qualitative study, this phenomenon spoke to the following overarching question: How does one high school institutionalize RtI? This case study examined the phenomenon of the change process within the classrooms of five individual teachers and one RtI specialist at one high school in regards to implementing RtI. This study was guided by three research questions that focused on the experiences of teachers as they moved through the phases of initiation, implementation, and institutionalization within their classroom.

RQ1: How did teachers perceive their experiences as they went through the Response to Intervention (RtI) change process?

RQ2: What are the strengths and/or challenges of the RtI change process?

RQ3: What specific actions facilitated or hindered their success in institutionalizing the RtI process?

Significance of the Study

In May 2014, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released the nations' report card. NAEP reported that 12th grade students were headed for graduation, but many students did not have the skills they needed to be successful in college or work. The test

was given to 92,000 twelfth-grade students in 2013. The results showed those seniors' reading skills had not changed since the last time the test was administered in 2009. Additionally, the tested students scored lower than the students tested in 1992 (Summers, 2014). According to the National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance (NCBLA; 2018), 64% of the nation's eighth-grade students are reading below grade level. This means that those students entering ninth grade are unable to read at the level of the required curriculum and become struggling students. Consequently, intervention is needed to help reduce the U.S. dropout rate among high school students. In 2011, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Miller indicated that one out of every four students entering their freshmen year in high school would not graduate on time or at all. The stakes were higher for students of underserved populations, where 1.2 million students gave up each year, indicative of 7000 students dropping out every day (USDOE, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to inform educators about sustaining promising research-based interventions that are used at the secondary level. Furthermore, the study addressed the complexity and uniqueness of the secondary environment and how to implement and sustain RtI at the secondary level. This study was also intended to add to the literature on RtI at the secondary level where little research is available.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were considered:

Disproportionality – The over- or under-representation of a given population group, often defined by racial and ethnic backgrounds (Elementary & Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

Implementation phase – The second of Fullan's (2007) three phases of change and is when a leader or organization puts an idea, program, or set of activities and structures into practice.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – ". . . a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the United States. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services" to children/students with disabilities (USDOE, 2004, p. 1).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) – This law called for early intervention and greater accountability. It raised standards for teachers who teach special education classes and demanded a shift in funding toward general education if a disproportionate number of minority students were placed in special education for any reason other than having a true disability (USDOE, 2004).

Initiation phase – The first of Fullan's (2007) three phases of change and is the phase that encompasses all of the activities that lead up to the decision to proceed with the process of implementation.

Institutionalization phase – The third of Fullan's (2007) three phases of change and is sustainability of the implementation.

Learning disability (LD) – ". . . a neurological condition that interferes with an individual's ability to store, process, or produce information. A learning disability can affect one's ability to read, write, speak, spell, compute math, reason and also affect an individual's attention, memory, coordination, social skills and emotional maturity" (Learning Disabilities Association of America, n.d., p. 1).

Over identified population – Having a higher percent of identified students represented in an area (Hosp, n.d.).

Professional development – Teacher training seminars that are a part of the forces that influence change. The purpose for professional development is to facilitate teacher change, but specifically change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes (Guskey, 1986).

Resistance – Part of the forces that influence change. It is defined as "employee behavior that seeks to challenge, disrupt, or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations" (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999, p. 36).

Response to Intervention (RtI) – The RtI process is a multi-step approach to providing services and interventions to students who struggle with learning. Services are provided at increasing levels of intensity. The progress students make at each stage of intervention or *tier* is closely monitored. Results of this monitoring are used to make decisions about the need for further research-based instruction and intervention in general education, in special education, or both (Ehren, n.d.).

School culture – The culture of the school is one of the forces that influence change and is defined as, "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group has learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1992, p. 12).

Secondary schools – Secondary schools consist of grades 9 through 12, or high school. These schools can also be considered as the intermediate level between elementary school and college which usually offer general, technical, vocational, or college-preparatory curricula (Learn.org, 2017).

Underserved population – The underserved population consists of students who do not receive resources that are equitable to other students in the academic pipeline. Typically, these groups of students include low-income, underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities, and first generation students as well as many others (Highe & Fisher, n.d.).

Assumptions

This qualitative study relied on the perceptions, knowledge, and experiences of the RtI specialist and teachers within one secondary high school. The study assumed the information from the participants during the in-depth interviews was accurate and portrayed an accurate picture of the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization phases of RtI at the high school.

Organization of the Study

To summarize, Chapter 1 reviewed the legislative and RtI background, discussed the over and under identification of SLD students, and reviewed the number of struggling students who dropout. In addition, this chapter discussed how RtI supports equitable educational access for all students and helps to bridge the gap between general and special education. This chapter also stressed the importance of effective instruction and the use of best practices. This study is organized into five chapters, a list of references, and appendices. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature emphasizing the following areas of interest: (a) comprehensive review of the Three-Tiered Model as a response to intervention model, (b) Fullan's (2007) change theory, and (c) forces influencing change.

Chapter 3 delineates the methodology and research design of the study, and discusses the participants, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations. Background

of the participants, the change theory process, and the themes as they relate to the research questions are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a discussion, findings related to the literature, conclusion, implications and recommendations for school leaders, suggestions for further research, and a summary. The study concludes with the appendices and references.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to inform educators about promising research-based interventions that are used at the secondary level. This chapter provides a general overview of the purpose, problem statement, theoretical framework, and research questions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Education held a Learning Disability Summit; during the summit the U.S. Department of Education endorsed the use of RtI for identifying students with learning disabilities. This endorsement along with NCLB of 2001 and IDEIA of 2004 drove response to intervention (RtI) to the national forefront in the field of education (Ogonosky, 2009b). This shift moved practice away from the traditional model of waiting for students to fail or to qualify for special education, to one of intervening immediately to prevent developmental delays and challenges from becoming disabilities (Greenwood, Bradfield, Kaminski, Linas, Carta, & Nylander, 2011).

The general purpose of RtI is to provide prevention and early intervention to struggling students. RtI was originally created to identify students with learning disabilities, address the needs of underperforming students, and avoid the over identification of students as having disabilities (Carr & Bertrando, 2012). According to Pascopella (2010), the RtI process has also generated a way for teachers and educational leaders to strategically identify struggling learners, without requiring special education services. This educational transformation has allowed RtI to completely change the way students are instructed and monitored.

In this chapter, an exploration of issues related to RtI is discussed through the ensuing literature review. Also of interest is the change process, how a school might implement the RtI model, and the complementary forces that might influence change. The following topics are addressed: (a) comprehensive review of the three-tiered model as a response to intervention model, (b) Fullan's (2007) change theory, and (c) forces influencing change.

Three-Tiered Model

RtI models have received great attention since proposed as an alternative to the traditional method used for identifying students with learning disabilities. Measuring the student's response in the general education classroom is a major feature of this approach. A common question that districts and schools have is how many stages or tiers of intervention are necessary within the RtI model (Marston, 2005). Although there is no empirical consensus on the best number of tiers, most models have three (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Tilly, 2008). Research has also shown that the three-tiered model is the most widely accepted RtI model in the U.S. (Batsche, Elliott, Graden, Grimes, Kovaleski, Prasse, & Tilly, 2006; Ogonosky, 2009a; Ogonosky, 2009b; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011).

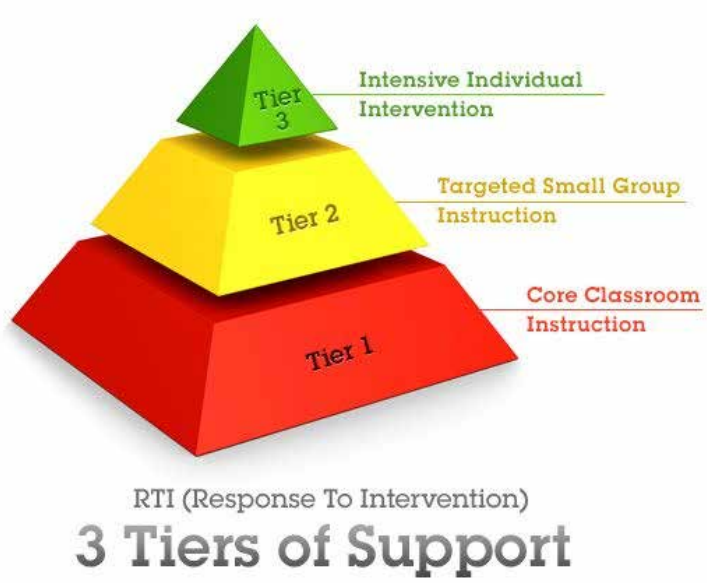

Figure 1. Three tiers of support. The role of response to intervention (RtI) in the determination of specific learning disabilities (SLD). Retrieved from http://impactofspecialneeds.weebly.com/rti-in-sld-determination-lauren-a.html

RtI is a tiered educational framework that supports students who are struggling academically while focusing on prevention (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002). The RtI framework is also used to monitor how well students respond to

evidence-based instructional interventions (Klotz & Canter, 2007; National Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.). The framework utilizes tiers of support which intensify and become more individualized as the student moves through the tiers (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Ogonosky, 2009a, 2009b; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). Ideally, students who do not respond to the individualized instruction would be considered for special education (Carreker & Joshi, 2010). Figure 1 represents an RtI three-tiered educational framework (Impact of Special Needs, 2017).

In Tier 1 of the three-tiered RtI model, educators implement research-based instructional practices, quality instruction, interventions, and strategies to all students in general education classrooms, and teachers use tools for universal screenings to assess students at least three times a year (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Ogonosky, 2009a). It is important for educators to understand that RtI is the responsibility of general education (Ogonosky, 2009a). Therefore, when referring to Tier 1, all must understand that Tier 1 is the foundation of the RtI process and involves the least intensive level of intervention. Eighty percent of all students fall into Tier 1, which is where good teaching should happen and all best-practice strategies should be implemented (Ogonosky, 2009a; Shapiro, n.d.). Teachers must also recognize that student success within the general education environment can be ensured by providing research-based proactive instruction and effective teaching strategies that focus on individual learning styles (Ogonosky, 2009a). This first tier must be in place for approximately 6 to 8 weeks in order for its validity to be measured (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

In Tier 2, teachers provide supplemental research-based interventions to students who respond poorly to general education instruction. These students receive targeted short-term systematic interventions that are personalized for small group participation. Those students who show improvement will be moved back to Tier 1 and will be closely monitored (Bradley,

Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; Hoover & Love, 2011; Ogonosky, 2009a). Ten to 15% of all students fall into Tier 2 (Ogonosky, 2009a). Tier 2 is different from Tier 1 because the instruction is more theory based and specialized by the general education teacher. Instruction can also be in collaboration with specialists in the field and special education teachers, either within the general education classroom or in a pull-out setting. Tier 2 interventions consist of increasing the time and intensity of the student's exposure to the core curriculum (e.g., 30 minutes two or three days per week). Again, progress is monitored and assessed after another 9 to 12 weeks of Tier 2 instruction (Harlacher, n.d.; Ogonosky, 2009a). While a student is in Tier 2 or 3, the teacher should identify the student's individual strengths and weaknesses and know which evidence-based strategies work best with the student. In addition, all interventions that are implemented should be implemented with fidelity (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008).

Tier 3 is designed for long-term supplemental intensive individual instruction. When students do not respond to interventions in Tier 2, they are moved to Tier 3 (Buffum et al., 2009; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Hoover, 2010; Hoover & Love, 2011; Ogonosky, 2009a). In this tier, the general education teacher is still expected to apply research-based interventions that have evidence-based positive effects on the student (Garcia, 2009; Ogonosky, 2009a). Generally, the intensity of the intervention will be two 30-minute sessions per day, 5 days a week, and is conducted by trained support personnel (Ogonosky, 2009a). A student can stay at Tier 3 for 9 to 12 weeks. At the end of that time period, data will be used to decide if the interventions are working or if further testing by special education should be requested (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Ogonosky, 2009a).

As opposed to other methods, RtI may have a unique ability to help educators identify students with learning disabilities. Students receive interventions to help them be successful in the classroom, and if students respond to the interventions, then the need for special education services is not necessary (Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006). Most importantly, the process of RtI demands that teachers gather specific data throughout the tiers and that all decisions made for students be strictly data-driven (Harlacher, n.d.; Ogonosky, 2009a; Shapiro, n.d.).

McInerney and Elledge (2013) stated that "RtI, when implemented with fidelity, can be a powerful driver for school improvement" (p. 14). RtI is a school improvement structure with numerous moving parts (Hoover & Love, 2011). Individual classrooms and schools continue to implement many of these parts in varying degrees (Jenkins, Schiller, Blackorby, Thayer, & Tilly, 2013). Some schools implement RtI with high levels of fidelity while others struggle to reach consistent outcomes (Kupzyk, Daly, Ihlo, & Young, 2012). It is challenging to make valid and informed decisions about student progress if RtI programs are not executed at a high level of consistency and fidelity (McInerney & Elledge, 2013). When RtI is not implemented with fidelity, educators are unable to attribute student progress or lack of progress, leaving outcomes up to speculation and luck (Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013).

Strong leadership, collaboration among teachers, parental support, and fidelity in implementing the program are key components for achieving RtI success (Ehren, Lipson, & Wixsonm, 2013). As soon as a model or innovation is selected, the district or school must aggressively collaborate to ensure the program is implemented with fidelity (Hoover & Love, 2011). According to Hall and Hord (2001), any confusion of the innovation leads to less fidelity of its original design. "It sometimes also leads to the early adopters of the innovation

establishing practices that are later determined to be inappropriate or even not in keeping with the original design" (p. 53). A high degree of quality implementation is dependent on each district or school choosing the appropriate model or innovation (International Reading Association, 2010). The decisions made at each stage of the implementation process are paramount before positive effects can be achieved (Kovaleski, VanDerHeyden, & Shapiro, 2013). Kovaleski, et al. suggest that in order to have effective implementation schools must incorporate the following procedures:

1. Understand and accurately identify the needs of the students requiring intervention
2. Ensure the chosen strategies are systematically and effectively delivered to resolve the learning problems for the majority of students exposed to the intervention
3. Continually monitor intervention procedures and outcomes; troubleshoot to ensure reliability in intervention processes
4. Make decisions for needed intervention variations
5. Use RtI data to help make decisions in special education referral and eligibility procedures
6. Use RtI data results to determine organizational alterations such as resource allocations, professional development, and program evaluations

The literature also states teachers must ensure selected interventions are implemented with fidelity, the intervention is research based, and the intervention is effective with the targeted student(s) (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008). In addition, the research suggests incorporating a continual improvement process which includes assessing fidelity of instruction throughout all RtI intervention tiers (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2015).

In summary, RtI operates a three-tiered model, each with its own components. All tiers implement research-based instructional practices and monitor progress. Tier 1 activities are universal and are applied to all students in general education. In Tier 2, teachers provide targeted, short-term systematic interventions that are personalized for small group participation.

However, when a student gets to Tier 3, educators realize that the student did not respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 interventions and that more intensive instruction is needed. Fidelity is also an important component of the three-tier model. At each tier, teachers and administrators need to see a high level of consistency and be able to validate that the data are reliable. Because RtI incorporates a system of coordinated services, the three-tiered model gives students the opportunity to improve through instructional best practices, or to require additional interventions that are individualized. In addition, the use of RtI helps educators identify struggling students early, thereby potentially lessening the impact of the disability or preventing the disability altogether (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). Implementing RtI effectively by a district or school requires appropriate planning, implementing, and sustaining of the three-tiered model.

Fullan's Change Theory

Educational leaders have been guided by Fullan's seminal work on systemic change. In his book, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan (1999) discussed the complexities of change:

> Change is difficult because it is riddled with dilemmas, ambivalences, and paradoxes. It combines steps that seemingly do not go together: to have a clear vision and be open-minded; to take initiative and empower others; to provide support and pressure; to start small and think big; to expect results and be patient and persistent; to have a plan and be flexible; to use top-down and bottom-up strategies; to experience uncertainty and satisfaction. Educational change is above all a very personal experience in a social, but often impersonal, setting. (p. 350)

Fullan (1991) identified culture as vital when it comes to change in schools. He stated, "Everyone inside and outside the school is going to have to put great energy over a period of time into changing the culture of the school. This means new values, norms, skills, practices, and structures" (p. 352). However, he also emphasized the need for action. He expressed that

we cannot sit and wait for others to make a move. Instead, we as individuals must assume responsibility and empower ourselves and others to become experts in the change process. He clarified this by indicating that systems change because people change systems through their actions.

In his book *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Fullan (2001) outlined five core capacities that leaders need in order to effectively implement change. These capacities are:

1. Moral purpose: the higher calling or enabling purpose of work;
2. Understanding of the change process:
    a. The goal is not to innovate the most – organically build innovation into the culture.
    b. It is not enough to have the best ideas- recognize weaknesses as well as strengths.
    c. Appreciate the implementation dip- effective leaders know that the change process is a process not an event, they don't panic if things don't go smoothly, they are empathetic and appreciative of resistance.
    d. Redefine resistance- build on differences and do not just go with likemindedness.
    e. Reculturing is the name of the game- do not adopt innovations one after another, develop a culture that has the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices all of the time.
    f. Never a check list, always complexity- no recipes or step-by-step processes.
3. Building relationships: successful strategies always involve relationships;
4. Knowledge building: share knowledge explicitly and strengthen capacity;
5. Coherence making: distinguish complexity from chaos (Fullan, 2001, p. xiv; Halupnik, 2013, pp. 51-52).

Fullan (1999) pointed out that educational change is complex and that to deal with such complexity is not to control the change, but to guide it. The leader must have a mindset that focuses on the change process through the lens of the systemic change. Thus, the components of

the system are associated and impact each other in a wide range of ways that may not generally be easy to distinguish, so they must be dealt with as a whole (Halupnik, 2013).

Along with Fullan, the contributions of Rogers, Ely, Hall, Hord, Elmore, and Hargreaves have shaped the landscape of educational change theory over the past four decades (Erickson, III, 2015). Their contributions are the historical backdrop of the field and continue to lead the future. However, Fullan's work has lead us to the three main phases of educational change theory. He simplified the change process by mapping it out with an outline of the phases which loop around outcomes categorized as either "student learning" or "organizational capacity" (Fullan, 2001, p. 51). The three phases are: (a) initiate the innovation, (b) implement the innovation, and (c) institutionalize the innovation. Figure 2 shows the dynamic interaction of the three phases in the educational change process.

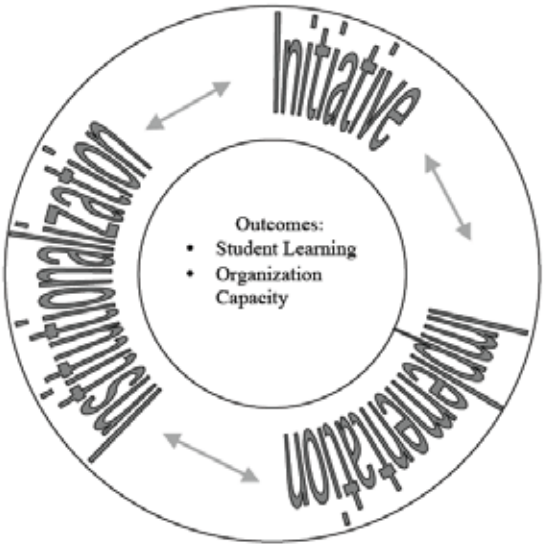

Figure 2. A simplified overview of the change process (Fullan, 2007, p. 56).

Initiation

Cohen (1995) wrote, "those first years … are clearly the most difficult ones for an institution embarking on long-term change initiatives" (p. vii). Fullan echoed this thought.

Initiation is the first of his three phases of change and is the phase that encompasses all of the activities that lead up to the decision to proceed with the process of implementation.

There are many factors that may influence the decision to make a change. Change may occur because of legislative or policy changes, community pressure, or teacher advocacy, and many times it may be a top-down or a bottom-up decision (Fullan, 2007). Whatever the case may be, when considering change, the first step should be a needs assessment. A needs assessment identifies areas within the educational environment that require some type of improvement (Ely, 1990; Roach, Kratochwill, & Frank, 2009). Within a school environment, the principal is generally charged with doing a needs assessment, and he or she identifies and creates a need for change (Gilstrap, 2007; McMaster, 2013). A moral imperative should guide the principal to ensure that all students receive the best education possible (Fullan, 2011). Additionally, all stakeholders must see the need for change, and the change must be communicated to all of the stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, community, etc.). Throughout this phase, communication is essential in order for the initiative to be successful (Daly & Finnigan, 2010).

Once the initiative has been decided upon, the principal and the leadership team need to create a vision for how to address the identified need, which will guide all involved throughout the change process (Russell, Warren, Minnick, & Richardson, 2011). The principal will need to keep in mind what the stakeholders want to accomplish and how the initiative will affect the school. Reason and Reason (2011) stated that the more people who are involved in the process, the greater the likelihood of eventual success.

Throughout this process, the principal will need to constantly measure the readiness of the school to accept and embrace the forthcoming changes (Ely, 1990; Reeves, 2009). Each

school is different and will respond to the change process differently based upon the existing culture, the individuals within the school, the community, and the leadership provided by the principal (Sahin, 2011). Gaining an understanding of the initiative and integrating it into the beliefs and knowledge base of the stakeholders is an important step in the initiation process (Fullan, 2007).

An important part of embedding this into the beliefs and knowledge base of the teachers and stakeholders is providing them with an opportunity to give input, make suggestions, and more importantly, provide them with time to mentally incorporate the intended initiatives within their belief system (Rosenblatt, 2004). Change is difficult. Abrupt changes do not give teachers enough time to process and grieve over the change (Hall & Hord, 2006). Research explains that familiarity is sometimes lost when the process of change is implemented. When people have to stop doing something that they know how to do well or stop doing something that they have always done, it creates a sense of sadness (Hall & Hord, 2006; Marris, 1975). Change is difficult, and often people must find their own meaning within the change before they can live with it (Marris, 1975). Therefore, the principal and/or the initiation team must be patient. Change can be neither rushed nor forced, and the gradual acceptance by all involved is the most likely path to success.

Implementation

Implementation is the next phase in the change process. Within this process, the individuals who are trying or expected to change put an idea, program, or set of activities and structures into practice (Fullan, 2007). However, Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, and Wallace (2005) expanded on this by defining implementation "as a specified set of activities designed to

put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions" (p. 5). They broke it down even further by stating "a specified set of activities" is the plan for implementing the initiative, "activity or program" is the intended initiative, and “known dimensions” is the intended outcome of the initiative. As Fullan (1991) stated, “Change is difficult.” Therefore, the implementation phase will not be any easier; it will be complex and will require a level of expertise on the part of the principal and implementers.

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) suggested that there are three main factors that affect implementation: (a) characteristics of change, (b) local factors, and (c) external factors. Fixsen, et al., (2005) suggested that there are three degrees of the implementation phase: (a) paper, (b) process, and (c) performance. Several years later, Fixsen, Blasé, Naoom, and Wallace (2009) identified six stages of implementation: (a) exploration and adoption, (b) program installation, (c) initial implementation, (d) full operation, (e) innovation, and (f) sustainability. Conversely, Fullan (2007) identified implementation as having four characteristics of change: (a) need, (b) clarity, (c) complexity, and (d) quality or practicality. In addition, Tubpun (2012) pointed out that these characteristics can be found in all three phases (i.e., initiation, implementation, and institutionalization) and, therefore, ebb and flow within phases of the change process. Although there are several suggested implementation factors or phases, for the purpose of this study we will use Fullan’s identified implementation process (need, clarity, complexity, and quality or practicality).

Need

A sense of urgency is critical for any change. Principals, or the leaders of the change initiative, need to create a sense of urgency by both selling the value of what the future will hold

and making the status quo a dangerous place for the stakeholders to remain. When this is done, the stakeholders understand why change is no longer optional (Tanner, 2017). Once all stakeholders recognize the need to change, the desire for implementation increases (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008).

Clarity

The lack of clarity of the innovation has been a persistent problem in many reform efforts and has been named as a major cause for the rejection or limited implementation of the innovation (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). In order to prevent this from happening, all stakeholders must be clear about the needs, goals, and implementation procedures from the start (Fullan, 2007; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008). Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein (1971) found that when teachers lacked clarity regarding their role in the innovation, the implementation failed. Without a clear vision and strong direction, the school will be pulled in many different directions. The stakeholders will wander blindly in multiple directions, some directions will cancel each other out, much work will be done, but very little will actually be accomplished (Bartle, 2009; Shead, 2017).

Complexity

Fullan (2007) described complexity as "the difficulty and extent of change required of the individuals responsible for implementation" (p. 90). Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) added to the definition by asking how deep and extensive is the change? Any change can be examined with regard to the level of difficulty; however, the deeper the change, the more meaningful the change is to all stakeholders. Though simple changes may be easier to carry out, they may not

make much of a difference and may not yield the results that you and the stakeholders are looking for (Fullan, 2007; Huberman & Miles, 1984). Similarly, while more complex implementations might be joined by disarray and difficulty, they may bring about more prominent and long-lasting change.

Quality and Practicality

Despite the need, clarity, and level of complexity, if teachers do not find practicality or high quality in the implementation, then the change will not last. Sarason (1995) found in her study that the implementation of a new math program failed because teachers perceived the program was neither practical nor of high quality. In order for educators to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for successful implementation, quality professional development opportunities and training need to be offered (Bartle, 2009; Fullan, 2007). Schoenfeld (2004) pointed out that without training, teachers shy away from or discredit curriculum they feel uncomfortable with. Quality professional development opportunities should be offered to all teachers throughout the implementation process; this helps in developing high-quality teachers with essential beliefs, knowledge, and skills.

Professional development for teachers improves their professional practice and the probability of successful implementation (Zepeda, 2008). Research suggests that in order to build the capacity of the teachers, the principal needs to provide relevant professional development, and then provide continual and intense support (Aitken & Aitken, 2008; Bryk, 2010; Popp, 2012). This will help to aid in the successful implementation of a change initiative.

The implementation phase is a very important step in the change process. If teachers or stakeholders do not support the change, there will be partial implementation or none at all; if

implementation does not occur, it cannot be fully attributed to the intervention itself (Vernez, Karam, Mariano, & DeMartini, 2006). Teacher buy-in is also very important because the teachers hold the power; without their buy-in, the change process can and will fail (Marris, 1975).

Institutionalization

The institutionalization phase is the sustainability of the implementation. Fullan (2007) clarified it as a stage where change is either developed as a continuous part of the system, or it vanishes by way of a decision to get rid of it or through slow destruction. Institutionalization is a continuation of the implementation phase, and over time it becomes the new culture (Fullan, 2007; Gordon & Patterson, 2008).

Institutionalization is the most difficult phase of the change process, and most initiatives do not make it to this phase (Chen, 2008; Guhn, 2009; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008). There are several reasons why large-scale reforms fail to reach the institutionalization phase: (a) the long time required to make a lasting change; (b) the fact that there is no immediate gratification; (c) the fact that people tire, lose their motivation, or lose interest in the change; and (d) the fact that they lose sight of their original goals, their sense of direction, their starting point, and/or their destination (Bartle, 2009; Black & Gregersen, 2002; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Gladwell, 2002; Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Gladwell (2002) pointed out that institutionalization and sustainability require perseverance.

When it comes to change, institutionalization and sustainability are two of the most significant issues leaders face as they strive to restructure and implement change that will last for decades, survive leadership changes, and withstand impending new initiatives (Lodge & Reed, 2003; Tam, 2009). The principal is responsible for keeping the vision in the forefront of the

minds of the stakeholders, as well as keeping staff inspired and focused on the end goal (Morrison, 2013). The principal must be 100% committed to the change initiative and its intended purposes (Seo et al., 2012). If the principal lacks vision or commitment, teachers will notice and follow the principal's lead, resulting in failure of the initiative. Although many factors contribute to the institutionalization and sustainability of the change initiative, it is vital that the principal maintain the vision and purpose of the initiation (Bryk, 2010; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013).

The goal for any school that goes through the change process is institutionalization and sustainability (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Ideally, the implemented change will be deeply rooted in the culture and become the new operating procedure of the school (Avidiv-Ungar & Eshet-Alkakay, 2011). All in all, institutionalization and sustainability is the end goal of the change process (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Forces Influencing Change

Any educational leader who wants to implement change will encounter forces that will positively or negatively impact the process. Change is difficult, and the educational leader who takes on this initiative will need to know the ins and outs of the school's culture, why teachers resist change, and how professional development impacts the initiative. The following sections discuss three major forces that influence the implementation of change: culture, resistance and professional development.

Culture

School culture and its impact on achievement have been studied for decades (Cohen,

McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Hoy, 2017). There is substantial research that supports the argument that in order for successful transformation to occur, practitioners must establish a culture of change (Ancess, 2000; Hampel, 1999; Hargreaves, 1997; Hollins, 1996; Sarason, 1996). There are also many formal definitions of school culture. Gruenert (2008) defined culture as the shared actions and common expectations of a team. Phillips (1996) defined culture as the attitudes and behaviors which define a school. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) defined culture as an informal understanding of the way things are done. However, Schein (1992), a longtime leading expert in the field of organizational culture, defined culture as:

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group has learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p.12)

Culture extends beyond the school building; it incorporates behaviors in and out of school and even crosses over into the school's traditions. Traditions and celebrations help develop a sense of community, family, and team membership within the school (Wagner, 2008). Culture also consists of and affects what the dress code is for faculty, what type of conversations are had in the teachers' lounge, a willingness to change, instructional practices, assessment, grading practices, and beliefs that every student can learn (Peterson & Deal, 1998). These beliefs not only develop over time, but they are also shared and/or handed down over time. If the cultural norms are congruent with the goal of the school, then the school will succeed. If the norms are incongruent or even toxic, the school will fail (Valentine, 2006).

Assessing the culture of a school is a complex and long process, but the culture of the school needs to be diagnosed and understood before meaningful change can take place (Hall, 2013; Kruse & Louis, 2009). In order for a principal to institute sustainable change, the principal

must understand the school's culture (Connolly, James, & Beales, 2011). Schein (2004) stated that culture has three different parts: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. A school's cultural artifacts are something easily observed, something that a visitor to a school may see and feel as he or she walks through the school, but something the visitor may not be able to interpret (Kruse & Louis, 2009). Some examples of school artifacts are: dress for the students and faculty, the mascot, a mural on a wall, or even the school's alma mater. Teachers and staff who work in the school are usually not conscious of the artifacts, and generally they are taken for granted.

The second part of the school culture is espoused values, which are the beliefs, actions, and conducts shared by staff members and ultimately define the workings of the school (Connolly et al., 2011; Kruse & Louis, 2009). An example of this is the following: the school culture for staff meetings is that the meetings are held every Monday at 7:30 am and are over at 8:00 am. If a meeting is scheduled for another day or if the meeting runs long, then it would upset the balance of the school and would be the topic of conversation all day. The last part of the school culture is an underlying assumption that the staff may have no documented data to back up their assumption. For instance, teachers may believe that the state assessment scores have decreased because of the growing ELL population. Underlying assumptions are the least discussed part of culture but can be the greatest deterrent to change (Schein, 2004). In order to fully understand the culture, the principal must identify the school's espoused values and the underlying assumptions (Reeves, 2009).

For any person who is trying to implement change, it is important to understand the personnel dynamics within a school and understand that some teachers will openly resist any initiative or training that diverges from the status quo. Institutionalized change requires

identifying the resisters and attempting to validate their concerns. The probability of change being successful increases if the principal or educational leader takes the time to understand the culture of the school; once the principal understands the culture, he or she can begin the lengthy process of achieving lasting change (Connolly et al., 2011; Gialamas, Pelonis, & Medeiros, 2014). Russell et al., (2011) also reminded us that understanding the school's culture and successfully implementing any change initiative are mutually dependent.

Resistance

The organizational perspective on planned change contends that resistance to change persists after a decision to adopt is made, continuing to exert influence throughout the process of adaptation and implementation. Berman and McLaughlin (1974) suggested the above in their groundbreaking work Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change. With their work documenting the resistance to change more than 40 years ago, today's researchers can be self-assured that resisting change is not a new concept. Conversely, Folger and Skarlicki (1999) defined resistance as "employee behavior that seeks to challenge, disrupt, or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations" (p. 36). Nevertheless, researchers must try to understand the reasons why teachers resist change and/or are unsuccessful at implementing change. Various reasons have been identified for why teachers resist change: (a) "inadequate professional development" (Dever & Lash, 2013, p. 12), (b) "we have always done it this way and it has worked so why change" (Gordon & Patterson, 2008, p. 23), (c) "concerns over student needs" (Danielowich, 2012, p. 106), (d) "to protect against emotional pain" (James & Jones, 2008, p. 3), (e) "a lack of trust in the initiative or those leading the change" (Kearney & Smith, 2010, p. 11), and (f) "change causes a sense of insecurity" (Winter & McEachern, 2001, p. 682).

Educators leading change need to plan for and expect resistance early on and throughout the initial phase of the process (Harris, 2011). Many times teachers believe that if they ignore or avoid the change initiative long enough that it will go away, or the principal will move on before requiring them to do the work of implementation (Bergmann & Brough, 2007). But this is an avoidance behavior (Ntinas, 2008). There are several reasons to avoid or resist change, but most correlate to maintaining the existing state of the school (Bergmann & Brough, 2007). Furthermore, teachers get burned out by going through one failed initiative after another, thus forming distrust for future change initiatives and distrust for the principal/educator leading the change process (Hinde, 2004; Kearney & Smith, 2010).

In New York State, a phenomenological study of 42 schools, both elementary and secondary, was conducted by Thornburg and Mungai (2011) on reform initiative for students with special needs. They collected 6 years' worth of data on teacher experiences. Within their research, Thornburg and Mungai (2011) focused on why teachers resist change. Additionally, they confirmed the importance of understanding teacher perceptions in order to comprehend why change initiatives flourish or fail. Since their study took place over several years, Thornburg and Mungai (2011) were able to capture different change initiatives in the early phases of implementation. Once the data were analyzed they found that lack of time arose as the leading reason why teachers resisted change; second was inconsistent leadership, and third was the concern over student needs. Teachers also stated that they were concerned about testing mandates and that the pressure for all students to achieve high academically was harmful to students who would be better off in a vocational training program. They also found that veteran teachers resisted change more often than newer teachers.

Professional Development

Many researchers have studied the importance of quality professional development and have found that it is essential when it comes to successful teacher adoption of school reform (Frank, Zhao, Penuel, Ellefson, & Porter, 2011; Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Johnson, Fargo, & Kahle, 2010; White, Polly, & Audette, 2012). Guskey (1986) stated that high quality professional development is a significant component for improving education. The purpose for professional development is to facilitate teacher change, specifically change in a teacher's beliefs and attitudes. In order for this to happen, the professional learning components must be multifaceted and carefully planned.

Once teachers have received their state certification, if they do not do any type of additional training they can become stagnant; however, when professional development is offered, the teachers are able to stay current in his or her field (Jaquith, Mindich, & Wei, 2010). Professional development provides teachers with updates about their content area, creates a shared vision for student learning, gives teachers adequate practice time to master new skills, and allows for opportunities for professional collaboration (Lee & Buxton, 2013). Furthermore, states that show the highest levels of K-12 student improvement are those states that have clear plans and mandated on-going teacher professional development (Jaquith et al., 2010). Advocates have suggested that effective professional development not only includes content specific information, but also active learning opportunities with colleagues from within the same school or district (Lee & Buxton, 2013; Mistretta, 2012). Other advocates have also pointed out that leadership is vital to the success or failure of professional development (Mizell, 2012).

Researchers have found that quality professional development progresses over time and is ongoing (Honey & Graham, 2012; Shymansky, Wang, Annetta, Everett, & Yore 2013; White,

Polly, & Audette, 2012). White et al. (2012) examined the implementation process of RtI at an elementary school. They found that over time, as teachers became more comfortable and competent with the innovation, they responded to professional development positively. Within this case study, teachers reported that implementation of the intervention was largely successful, and they cited supportive leadership and quality professional development as major reasons for success. In addition, teachers also stated that being able to see swift positive student outcomes motivated them to make the necessary changes.

White et al. (2012) also found that the matrix that was used revealed that teachers felt overwhelmed and exhausted early in the process; they stated that the time that they were spending on the new initiative took them away from other activities. This research shows the importance of quality leadership and how critical it is to have professional development in the early stages when teachers are feeling overwhelmed. Resilient leadership will guide teachers through the challenging phase of reform; however, when teachers start to see the positive student results, teachers are provided with a new motivation to continue to implement change.

As Benjamin Franklin said, "There is nothing certain except death and taxes." Roettger (2006) added that the third certainty is *change*. Roettger also shared that change without improvement is the cause for frustration in U.S. schools; therefore, change must be synonymous with progress. Professional development is all about change, so whether change is voluntary or mandated, researchers have recognized that teachers will ultimately determine to what extent and in what way they want to change and how the change will be implemented (Beck, Czerniak, & Lumpe, 2000; Richardson & Placier, 2001).

In summary, there is little to no argument that our schools need to change in order to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the 21st century.

Change is difficult, and the work of the teacher is complex. However, with a greater understanding of the change process and how culture, professional development, and resistance all work together, the educational leader will have a better chance of being successful.

Literature Review Summary

Presented in this chapter was a review of literature surrounding the process of change. Specifically, the discussion included various change components associated with RtI and the components that will affect RtI as a change process, which included the Three-Tiered Model, Fullan's Change Theory, and the forces influencing change.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Rossman and Rallis (2003) defined *case study* as an "in-depth and detailed exploration of single examples…to understand the larger phenomenon through close examination of a specific case" (p. 104). This real-life phenomenon focuses on the phases of change regarding the Response to Intervention (RtI) model as experienced by classroom teachers. This case study examined the phenomenon of the change process within the classrooms of five teachers and one RtI specialist at one high school, in regards to implementing RtI. As a qualitative study, this phenomenon addressed the following overarching question: How does one high school institutionalize RtI? This study was guided by three research questions which focused on the experiences of teachers as they moved through the three phases of initiation, implementation, and institutionalization within their classroom. The research questions which guided this study were:

RQ1: How did teachers perceive their experiences as they went through the Response to Intervention (RtI) change process?

RQ2: What are the strengths and/or challenges of the RtI change process?

RQ3: What specific actions facilitated or hindered their success in institutionalizing the RtI process?

Although this research is grounded in a case study approach, Fullan's (2007) change theory was the lens by which the data were examined. This study encompassed the use of interviews, observations, artifacts, and my field notes to collect data. However, when collecting data, I was looking for evidence to support the specific phase the individual classroom was in (i.e., initiation, implementation, or institutionalization).

Research Design

The research design followed a case study methodology which examined several teachers' journeys through the change process in regards to implementing RtI. Yin (1984) defined a case study research method as an inquiry that examines a phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the limits between phenomenon and context are not evident. Merriam (1998) stated that the case study method is suitable for research that is examined in its actual context and conducive to understanding a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. Therefore, the decision to examine one school in this study is based on my wish to acquire insight into how teachers go from initiation, to implementation, and then are able to institutionalize a change process within their classroom.

An RtI specialist and five secondary teachers participated in the study. The data sources for this study included interviews, observations, artifacts, and my field notes. The data collection and analysis procedures were for the purpose of identifying the experiences of the teachers, understanding the strengths and/or challenges within the classroom, and determining the specific actions that teachers reported facilitated or hindered their success.

Participants

The study was conducted in one north Texas school in its ninth year of RtI implementation. Between the years of 2007 and 2011, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported this high school's academic excellence indicator system (AEIS) rating as Academically Acceptable and Recognized. Later, for the years of 2012 through 2016, TEA reported that this school Met Standard through the state's new accountability rating.

According to TEA for the year of 2016 to 2017, this school had approximately 2,542 students in grades 9 through 12. There were 169.8 teachers with a class size of 24.54 students. The focus of this study was on RtI and how this north Texas school was able to sustain RtI school wide. A convenience sample of five teachers was selected by the RtI specialist to participate in the study. The RtI specialist, two English teachers, one math teacher, one science teacher, and one social studies teacher were selected. The following criteria were used: (a) participant must have at least 5 years of teaching experience on the selected campus, (b) participant must have 2 years of RtI implementation in the classroom, and (c) participant must teach English, math, science, or social studies.

I assigned the participants a pseudonym to maintain participant confidentiality. The teachers were asked to use their *alter ego* or some other name that was relevant to them. The assigned label to each participant held no value or meaning to me but was a simple method to code and track participants anonymously while transcribing data.

In 2009-2010, this school along with the district adopted RtI as a general education strategy for early identification and intervention for struggling students. Administrators, teachers, and the RtI specialist relied on RtI because it purported to promote high-quality instruction and universal screening of all students in the general education setting. In addition, this north Texas school designed its interventions based on research and on the specific needs of the student, while consistently and frequently monitoring the effectiveness of the intervention.

In this north Texas school, the RtI specialist guided campus administrators and teachers in identifying students who met the district defined guidelines. At the secondary level, universal screeners were used to determine whether a student was supported through RtI; however, the universal screeners did not necessarily stand alone; a student may have been recommended for

RtI if three or more of the universal screeners indicated risk. The screeners were: (a) failure of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), also known as End of Course (EOC), in grades 9 through 12; (b) attendance measured by the number of days missed in a nine week period; (c) course failures measured by the number of core (i.e., English, math, science, and social studies) courses failed in a nine week period; and (d) at-risk indicators, (i.e., retained in one or more grades, was a parent, AEP placement, homeless, or on probation).

The onsite RtI specialist was also responsible for organizing, coordinating, and monitoring student progress. Additionally, the specialist provided administrators and teachers with data to drive campus RtI decision making. The RtI specialist provided training to teachers and staff on what RtI is, how to implement it, and how to monitor RtI students. Finally, the RtI specialist tracked students through each of the three tiers and met with teachers and administrators to determine if the intervention worked, and if and when the student needed to move to the next tier.

Data Collection

For this study, interviews, observations, artifacts, and my field notes were used to collect data. Reliability and validity of the data in regard to RtI effectiveness was determined throughout this study through member checks and triangulation of data. By using the strategy of member checks, participants were given the opportunity to change or add anything to their interview, thus checking the accuracy of the transcript. In this study, member checks addressed the issue of researcher bias and contributed to the credibility of data interpretation. Triangulation of data compared data from several different sources and ensured greater validity and reliability.

Data collection began in the Fall 2017 school semester. A copy of the informed consent letter (see Appendix A) was included and attached to the invitation email (see Appendix B); these were presented again to each participant at the time of the interview, prior to moving forward. I explained the contents, and participants were asked to confirm understanding of the informed consent by signing it prior to data collection. Once received, each participant received a personal phone call, and another email that explained the study. Finally, I set up a face-to-face interview.

Case studies generally rely on three strategies: observation, interviews, and document review (Stake, 1995); however, usually one or two strategies are used more than the other. In this study, the interview process and artifacts reviewed were the primary strategies used. Semi-structured interviews assisted me in determining general patterns of a teacher's behavior and helped to determine if the teacher was using the RtI model to its fullest potential. Edwards and Holland (2013) defined a semi-structured interview as an interview where the researcher asks questions about a topic he or she wants to cover in the interview; fortunately, there is flexibility in how and when the questions are asked, because it depends on the interviewee's replies. When using a semi-structured interview protocol, the interviewer can probe for answers and can follow up with questions by starting a dialogue. During the interview process, the interviewer is interested in the context and the content, but is also looking for how the interviewee understands the topic and what the interviewee wants to convey to the interviewer. Essentially, this type of interview enables considerably more space for interviewees to reply on their own terms as compared to structured interviews. In addition, this type of interview does provide some structure for comparison across interviewees by covering similar subjects and even in a few occurrences utilizing the same questions.

During the interview process, I interviewed the participants in a private setting. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed immediately thereafter. All interviews began with an overview of the study, its purpose, and a review of the informed consent letter. I reassured all participants that confidentiality of the study would be maintained and that they would have the opportunity to review, analyze, and make changes to their personal transcript. I asked *get to know you* questions at the beginning so the interviewee could relax; these questions may or may not have been transcribed. The interview protocol was administered as follows:

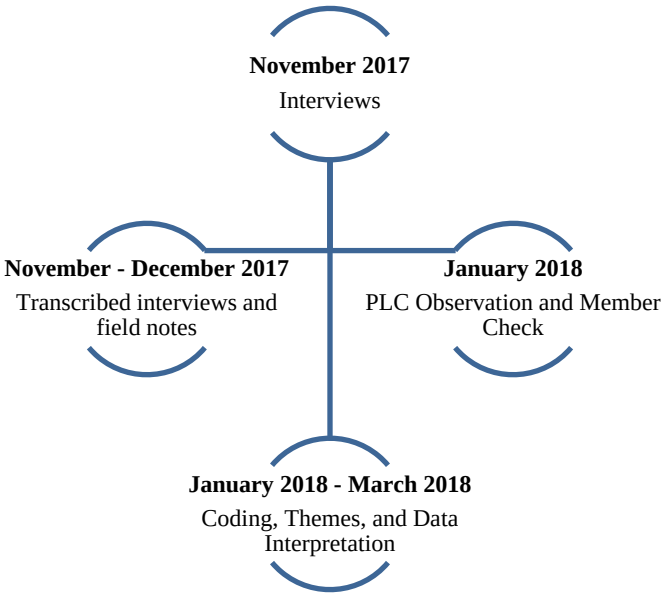

Figure 3. Interview timeline.

For the purpose of this research, the interview process identified the teachers' experiences, identified the strengths and challenges within the classroom, and determined the specific actions that teachers reported facilitated or hindered their success in the RtI process. The interview protocol helped me show how educators implemented change to develop and obtain new skills with RtI and perhaps over time vary their use. It also allowed me to gain insight into how the school was able to sustain the innovation, and to gain information about innovation related behaviors and about observability. Observability was not only being able to

see an innovation in use, but it was being able to see the results from that innovation. Hall and Hord (2006) stated that when observability was high, teachers demonstrated behaviors that supported adopting the innovation; in this case, the innovation was RtI.

Data collection included observations of a PLC meeting. The purpose of the observation was to gather data on the participant's behaviors and practices in order to determine which phase the participant was in – initialization, implementation, or institutionalization. I attended two meetings in the fall semester. The extent of the observations was captured in the field notes using an observation protocol. I was a non-participant observer.

Artifacts also served as a data source. Documents such as data binders, school generated reports, formal and informal documents, policy and procedures, and monitoring sheets were included. This helped me triangulate all of the data collected. Finally, I collected field notes, which were included to supplement data collection. Field notes were taken during the interview and the observation of the teachers. The field notes recorded included non-verbal observations and impressions and included themes, follow-up questions, intentional vocabulary, thoughts, and any other information that stood out. The field notes were transcribed.

With the use of multiple data collection methods, I was able to increase the validity and reliability of the data collected. Dobbert (1982) stated that "Multiple perspectives permit cross checking of all types of data for accuracy and completeness. They also add to depth and breadth of interpretation" (p. 265).

Data Analysis

This case study examined the institutionalization of RtI practices at the secondary level. To investigate the phenomenon, the study focused on the change process within the classrooms

of five individual teachers and one RtI specialist at one high school and was examined through the lens of Fullan's (2007) change theory, this case study's theoretical framework. The analysis focused on data collected through interviews, observations, artifacts, and my field notes. The interview process was digitally recorded, transcribed, and uploaded to the NVivo software. My field notes and artifacts were also uploaded to NVivo. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software package that facilitates the organization of unstructured data by classifying, sorting, and arranging information to determine relationships, patterns, and/or trends in the data (QSR International, 2017).

Richards, a developer of NVivo, stated that NVivo "is designed for the researchers who wish to display and develop rich data in dynamic documents" (1999, p. 412). Researchers who have used a computer-based qualitative analysis software "believe that using computers in the qualitative analysis process may add rigor and prestige to the research study, also to the quality of the analysis" (Ozkan, 2004, p. 590). However, Ozkan went goes on to say that "it is still the researchers who will make the decision for their data organization, coding, or analysis." She also stated that computer programs "do not add rigor…but the way researchers handle their data using these programs does add rigor" (p. 590). The data were analyzed using NVivo; NVivo was chosen because it was the best fit for the study. NVivo's design has a graphical user interface that is similar to Microsoft Office. Basic concepts and terminology differ but can be learned. Some important functions include:

1. Import and analyze text
2. Coding with coding stripes and highlights
3. Relationship coding
4. Text search, word frequency and coding queries
5. Charts, word clouds, word trees, explore and comparison diagrams

6. Memos and annotations
7. Generate a report of your coding structure, including descriptions, and align coding (QSR International, 2017, para. 2)

The use of NVivo allowed me to examine coded passages and look at data emphasizing the relationships within it. It also allowed me to do a cross-interview analysis, re-order the codes, and look for the evidence needed to answer the research questions. These capabilities fit well with this case study's research goals and allowed me to concentrate on concepts and complex thinking about the data (Ozkan, 2004). Analysis of data, by overlaying the theoretical framework, yielded answers to my research questions. I used NVivo to assist with the analysis of data, which then assisted in coding. More intricate codes were cultivated to ascertain common themes which spanned the units of analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1

Organizational Stages for Coding and Themes

Preliminary Codes and Node Categories	Code Categories	Correlation of Theme - To Research Question
RtI Training, Change Process, Initiation, Implementation, Institutionalization, Progress Monitoring	Best Practices	RtI integration into instructional practices Research Question 1: How did teachers perceive their experiences as they went through the Response to Intervention (RtI) change process?
Expectations, Professional Learning Communities, Resistance	PLC, Time, and Seating	PLC Structure, Challenges and Obstacles post-implementation Research Question 2: What are the strengths and/or challenges of the RtI change process?
Systems of Support, Instructional Strategies, Professional Development, Leadership Expectations, School Culture	RtI Specialist	Role of the RtI Specialist Research Question 3: What specific actions facilitated or hindered their success in institutionalizing the RtI process?

The process of coding and analysis was as follows: prior to reading interview transcripts, reviewing artifacts, or observing the PLCs, I reviewed the interview protocol and identified key phrases that related directly to the research questions. A list of 14 codes were identified and created in NVivo; these codes in NVivo are called nodes. Interviews were read line by line and assigned a node. Nodes were then narrowed down to five codes. Data were streamlined based on content, since there was overlap in the content that related to each node. This overlap allowed me to group related data. I reread the data to determine which words, phrases, and topics recurred in the data. I also reviewed all of the transcripts a final time and compared them to the data collected from the PLC meetings to determine if the findings, themes, and categories were consistent with the data. Finally, through triangulation and discounting of data, the following four themes were confirmed: RtI integration into instructional practices, professional learning communities (PLC) structure, challenges and obstacles post-implementation, and role of the RtI specialist.

Limitations

The current case study consisted of qualitative data gathered through interviews, observations, artifacts, and my field notes. Limitations of the study were taken into consideration when collecting data. Specifically, the school had already completed the initiation phase of the change theory; therefore, interviews served as a method to probe deeper into the participants' prior experience with the initial phase of the school's RtI implementation. Thus, a baseline was established. The effectiveness of RtI depends upon the integrity of the interventions – implemented as planned, intended, and originally designed. The depth of understanding of RtI

as it related to each of the teachers was taken into consideration. It was assumed all participants would respond to each interview question honestly and without bias.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from a convenience sample of participants who used RtI and have no relationship to me. The participants in this study were completely voluntary. The participants, including the RtI specialist, signed an informed consent form which included: (a) disclosure of study procedures and potential risks to prospective research participants, (b) participant comprehension of the information, and (c) participant voluntary agreement, free of coercion and undue influence, to research participation.

All participant identities were protected by assigning each participant a name and removing all identifiers from collected data. Data gathered during research, such as digital interviews, interview transcripts, artifacts, and my field notes, were kept confidential in order to guard the names of all participants from other participants and honor anonymity. Information included in my final dissertation was presented in a way that would mask the individuals' identities, should they choose to remain anonymous after reviewing the entirety of the study. Specifically, I diligently adhered to the ethical conduct of research. This research was conducted as a partial requirement for my dissertation through the University of North Texas and was approved before the data collection process began (see Appendix D).

As a researcher, I must point out a possible positionality bias. The study was focused at one north Texas high school where I worked from 2005-2016. In addition, I was one of the administrators who implemented the initial phase of RtI for the school and the district. As the original administrator assigned to RtI, I was actively involved in the onsite data collection,

identification of students, monitoring of students, and ensuring that RtI was implemented with fidelity and with research-based interventions. Once the school allocated resources to hire an RtI specialist, my role was limited in the decision making process and was nonexistent at the time the study was conducted. Therefore, I may have unintentionally influenced or held a bias toward data collection, or I may have had a bias concerning data interpretation. I used reflexivity to counter any possible bias (Stake, 1995).

The interviews, observation, artifacts, and field notes were collected during the 2017-2018 school year, 1-1/2 years after I left that district. Part of the criteria for selecting the teacher participants was that they needed to have worked on that campus for a minimum of 5 years. This meant I had worked as their administrator. However, during this time, the RtI specialist would have been responsible for implementing RtI.

> Bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgment help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research. (Griffiths, 1998, p. 133)

By acknowledging the possibility of positional bias, I asked the RtI specialist to select all participants for this study, and I had participants review and make changes to their interview transcript. My positionality was an important element to this research, but I am mindful of the influence that it may have had.

Summary

This chapter explained the research methods and design that were used to examine the institutionalization of RtI practices at the secondary level. Specifically, this chapter included information on the research design, participants, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and the ethical considerations of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, data collection and analysis are organized as follows: background of the participants, the change theory process, and the themes as they relate to the research questions. The school and each participant were given a pseudonym and results are presented through the eyes of the participants. Data from the professional learning community (PLC) meetings are also weaved into each section. The themes found in this study are as follows:

Theme 1: Response to Intervention (RtI) Integration into Instructional Practices

Theme 2: PLC Structure

Theme 3: Challenges and Obstacles Post-Implementation

Theme 4: Role of the RtI Specialist

Background of the Participants

Anna Grimes – RtI Specialist

Mrs. Grimes had a Bachelor's degree in English and a Master's degree in secondary education with an emphasis in reading. In addition, she was certified to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) and had her principal certification. Mrs. Grimes always claimed she would never become a teacher, but she discovered it was the right profession for her when tutoring students with learning disabilities at Texas Tech University. Her first year at Moss High School was an internship year, and she had continued working at this campus for 11 years. Mrs. Grimes taught English and Reading for 7 years before leaving the classroom to work as the RtI specialist, a position she had held for 4 years. Mrs. Grimes was significantly impacted by attending a summer institute with the National Writing Project and then the New Hampshire

Literacy Institute. In and out of the classroom, she desired to help readers and writers grow in their literacy skills.

Jean Fischer – English Teacher

Mrs. Fischer graduated at the top of her class at Western Illinois University. After graduation she was recruited by a major north Texas independent school district (ISD) where she worked for 2 years. She stated, "This was definitely not my kind of school system. The kids are not cookie cutters and that copyrighted curriculum is not for everyone." Mrs. Fischer wanted to have a little more flexibility in her teaching and so, after her first 2 years, she realized she needed to find something else. She then stated she met her last principal and was asked to teach at a middle school in another north Texas ISD. She moved with that principal to a new high school; this was now her 17th year in education and her 11th year at Moss High School. Mrs. Fischer had been using RtI in her classroom for the past 7 years.

Dallas Rudolph – Science Teacher

Mrs. Rudolph had a Bachelor of Science degree with a minor in speech communication from Sol Ross University. She received her Master's degree from Texas A & M University in educational administration and her principal certification. She held a composite science (8-12) certification along with her special education certification (EC-12). She started her Ph.D. in educational administration, but with the death of her father, the birth of her son, and supporting her husband's career path, she timed out. However, before timing out, she enrolled at a local university where she received her second Master's degree in educational psychology specializing in emotional behavioral disorders. Mrs. Rudolph worked in a self-contained high school for a

period of time. She then interviewed at Moss High School and had been there for 10 years. She started off in the special education department and then transferred to the science department: "I always wanted to be in the classroom, I have a passion for teaching, and I really love science, fell in love with the people here and ended up staying." Mrs. Rudolph came from a family of educators, "father in law – superintendent, mother – superintendent, dad – director of curriculum, mother in law – principal, mom's aunt's principal, and sister is a teacher everyone in my family is an educator, all of them!" Mrs. Rudolph had been using RtI in her classroom for the past 8 years.

Barbara Terronez – Social Studies Teacher

Mrs. Terronez was a local college graduate with a degree in history and held two certifications, one in social studies (8-12) and the other in history (8-12). She did her student teaching at Moss High School and was hired shortly after. Mrs. Terronez always knew she wanted to be a teacher. "When I was a little kid I was playing with dolls and pretending to be the teacher, so it's just always been what I wanted to do." However, her brother was the main reason she entered education. Her brother grew up with ADHD, and according to Mrs. Terronez, he was labeled as a bad kid beginning in kindergarten. She described that the traditional educational system was "not conducive for how he learned." Observing her brother's challenges in the schooling system shaped how she wanted to enter the education field. Mrs. Terronez's desire for her role in education was to provide students like her brother dignity and fairness. She had been using RtI in her classroom for the past 5 years.

Gwen Mathesen – Math Teacher

Mrs. Mathesen began college majoring in music, playing the clarinet, at Southern Methodist University. While in college she realized that she needed a backup plan. "I knew I'd always been good at math." She changed majors and obtained a Master's of education in mathematics. Mrs. Mathesen also stated, "I pretty much had always known that I wanted to teach in some form or another." She attributed this to validation by others that she would be a good teacher. Mrs. Mathesen received a bachelor's degree in music, a Master's degree in mathematics, and she recently completed a Master's degree in applied statistics. Mrs. Mathesen also held a math certification (8-12), a supplemental ESL certification, and was practically bilingual. She completed her student teaching at Moss High School and had been there for the past 10 years. She shared, "I don't know if I'll ever leave." Mrs. Mathesen had been using RtI in her classroom for the past 5 years.

Linda Elliott – English Teacher

Mrs. Elliott always wanted to be a teacher; however, she made a choice to stay home, be a supportive wife, and raise her children. She recalled the nostalgic feeling each time she took her children to school to register them, indicating "I wanted to be there [at school], always, but I just didn't allow that to happen until my family moved back to Texas." She finished her bachelor's degree in English, at the University of Oklahoma and then obtained an alternative teaching certification. Mrs. Elliott recalled enrolling her sophomore daughter in Moss High School where she noticed the schedule said "staff" for her daughter's English teacher. She enquired about the position and noted, "the rest is history and I've loved it ever since." She was hired 13 days before school started. During her first year of teaching, Mrs. Elliott received her

master's degree and at that time realized she had a natural giftedness for teaching. Mrs. Elliott had used RtI in her classroom for the past 9 years.

Results

In this section, I analyzed and interpreted data collected from interviews, observations, artifacts, and my field notes from a research project conducted at Moss High School. The purpose was to understand how educators at Moss High School implemented and sustained the RtI process school wide. The data were collected primarily through participant interviews of one RtI specialist and five teachers from the English, math, science, and social studies departments. The arrangement of this section is organized by research questions and their direct connection to the themes as discovered in the analysis. The analysis of data from interviews, observation of PLC, and the documents reviewed answered the overarching question: How does one high school institutionalize Response to Intervention? The following themes were extracted and organized under the corresponding research sub-questions:

Research Question 1: How did teachers perceive their experiences as they went through the Response to Intervention (RtI) change process?

Theme 1: RtI Integration into Instructional Practices

Research Question 2: What are the strengths and/or challenges of the RtI change process?

Theme 2: Professional Learning Community Structure

Theme 3: Challenges and Obstacles Post-Implementation

Research Question 3: What specific actions facilitated or hindered their success in institutionalizing the RtI process?

Theme 4: Role of the RtI specialist

The responses to the above questions were evaluated through the analysis of collected data. Change theory was not explicitly prominent in all sections but was integrated into the data

elucidation. Therefore, before delving into the research questions and themes, I will first revisit the framework of this study.

Framework – Change Theory

Initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing educational change is a complex process. Tradition and familiar routines and practices are easy to maintain and follow. The challenge for any leader is to bring about change that is sustained and makes a real difference in the quality of learning and in the life of the institution. Fullan's (2007) change theory was the framework for this study. According to Fullan, change occurs over time in three phases: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. Each phase depends on the prior phase's success in order to move forward. Fullan's change theory consists of the following phases:

1. Initiation is the first of three phases of change and is the phase that encompasses the activities that lead up to the decision to proceed with the process of implementation (Fullan, 2007).
2. Implementation, within this process, is the individuals who are trying or expected to change or put an idea, program, or set of activities and structures into practice (Fullan, 2007).
3. Institutionalization is a continuation of the implementation phase, and over time it becomes the new culture (Fullan, 2007; Gordon & Patterson, 2008).

The ultimate goal for any school in the change process of implementing an innovation is institutionalization (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Ideally, the implemented change will be deeply-rooted in the culture and become the new operating procedure of the school (Avidiv-Ungar & Eshet-Alkakay, 2011). Since this study focused on how a school implemented and sustained RtI, the data collection and analysis process were on the latter two phases. The data presented speaks to the strengths and challenges of the implementation and institutionalization process.

Research Questions and Themes

In this section, themes are organized by their direct connection to the research questions as discovered through data analysis and interpretation. The following are the themes organized under their corresponding research questions.

Research Question 1

How did teachers perceive their experiences as they went through the response to intervention (RtI) change process? The resulting theme was RtI integration into instructional practices.

As a result of data analysis, teachers at Moss High School revealed that participants did not see RtI as a program, but instead as embedded RtI practices, which have become part and parcel of their day-to-day instructional practices. The participants philosophically considered it as a way to do what was best for students in order for them to learn content. Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher stated,

> I would say that RtI is always part of our planning [time] and in our thought process without saying RtI…Because we've always got to think about the whole spectrum of students. So we're always thinking about how we can help them. We are always asking 'What are we going to do that's going to help these kids that are at-risk?'

Mrs. Elliott described RtI as "in the fabric" of their planning, where individual student needs were discussed. To appreciate how the teachers perceived their experience as they went through the RtI change process, the following evidence was arranged by Fullan's (2007) three phases of the change – initiation, implementation, and institutionalization – as they pertained to RtI integration into the daily instructional practices. Since the focus of this study was on the implementation and institutionalization phases, documents were gathered which provided evidence for the initiation stage.

Initiation

At the end of the 2008-2009 school year, the district decided to incorporate RtI into its current system of referring a student to special education. At Moss High School, the principal and the leadership team were in charge of the rollout as well as all training. No formal training was provided by the district. Instead, the principal and the leadership team received training from the local educational service center and from literature that they were required to read. The principal adopted the district's RtI vision and used that vision to guide the school and all stakeholders through the RtI process; below was the district's and school's RtI vision:

> Response to Intervention is a targeted approach to support the individual needs, both academic and behavior, of all students. High quality instruction and universal screening of all students in the general education setting is the foundation of success. Response to Intervention is a problem-solving process, not a pre-referral process. With this being said, it is important to note that interventions be designed based on the specific needs of a child and monitored consistently and frequently in an effort to determine effectiveness.

Training for research-based practices in RtI began when the school opened in 2005. In the first year, the principal provided professional development during monthly staff meetings. These meetings happened during monthly 90-minute sessions. Thereafter, adjustments were made in the training based on faculty or student needs. The training was focused on research-based instructional strategies since RtI was not prevalent and the principal's focus was not on RtI per se. The professional development was aimed at establishing a good foundation for sound pedagogical strategies. A teacher, who was at the school from the inception, shared details of the training through an email communication post-interview.

The training first used was *Classroom Instruction That Works* by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001). This training was conducted by the principal and her leadership team and included nine essential instructional strategies teachers were expected to use:

1. Identifying similarities and differences.
2. Summarizing and note taking.
3. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition.
4. Homework and practice.
5. Nonlinguistic representations.
6. Cooperative learning.
7. Setting objectives and providing feedback.
8. Generating and testing hypotheses.
9. Cues, questions, and advance organizers.

Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, recalled another training aid, *What Great Teachers Do Differently* (Whitaker, 2012). This training was also led by the principal and her leadership team. Staff meetings occurred once a month, and the focus of each staff meeting was on one or two subjects in Whitaker's book. A summary of the subjects were:

1. Great teachers never forget that it is people, not programs that determine the quality of a school.
2. Great teachers establish clear expectations at the start of the year and follow them consistently as the year progresses.
3. Great teachers manage their classrooms thoughtfully. When they say something, they mean it.
4. When a student misbehaves, great teachers have one goal: to keep that behavior from happening again.
5. Great teachers have high expectations for students but have even higher expectations for themselves.
6. Great teachers know that they are the variable in the classroom. Good teachers consistently strive to improve, and they focus on something they can control: their own performance.
7. Great teachers focus on students first, with a broad vision that keeps everything in perspective.

8. Great teachers create a positive atmosphere in their classrooms and schools. They treat every person with respect. In particular, they understand the power of praise.

9. Great teachers consistently filter out the negatives that don't matter and share a positive attitude.

10. Great teachers work hard to keep their relationships in good repair to avoid personal hurt and to repair any possible damage.

11. Great teachers have the ability to ignore trivial disturbances and the ability to respond to inappropriate behavior without escalating the situation.

12. Great teachers have a plan and purpose for everything they do. If plans don't work out the way they had envisioned, they reflect on what they could have done differently and adjust accordingly.

13. Before making any decision or attempting to bring about any change, great teachers ask themselves one central question: What will the best people think?

14. Great teachers continually ask themselves who is most comfortable and who is least comfortable with each decision they make. They treat everyone as if they were good.

15. Great teachers have empathy for students and clarity about how others see them.

16. Great teachers keep standardized testing in perspective. They focus on the real issue of student learning.

17. Great teachers care about their students. They understand that behaviors and beliefs are tied to emotion, and they understand the power of emotion to jumpstart change.

Since this was a new school with new staff, the principal's focus was on developing a collaborative culture and establishing the base for sound pedagogical practices. The goal was to lay a solid foundation for all teachers and to move the collective in the same direction together. Whitaker (2012) discussed the beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and interactions of great teachers and explained what they do differently. Whitaker's book reinforced the principal's goal of establishing a professional culture that focused on exceptional instructional practices, which was critical toward a seamless transition into the RtI process. This professional development assisted in the RtI process by providing the foundation for good core instruction. This led to instructional strategies, which were routinely used with all students. Exposing all teachers to Whitaker's

beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and interactions was essential to laying the ground work for embedding intervention into the instructional program.

Linda Elliott, an English teacher, reflected back to the initiation stage, which was her first year of teaching. She was surprised, as a first-year teacher, that her colleagues were not implementing interventions based on RtI, which she had learned in her teacher preparation program.

> Wait, everybody doesn't do this. And so now we've got to have some entity that tells teachers this is what you need to be doing. I already did it! I saw the need and I tried to meet it…but the fact that we have this program or strategy lets me see that everybody doesn't do it and that everybody doesn't think like I do.

Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher who had already been teaching for a while, described resistance to the implementation of RtI:

> I think that with any sort of movement there's always resistance in education. I think that a lot of the documents we have are very helpful for consistency, especially for parents and administrators. In a lot of ways, I do feel like they were designed with the intent of helping teachers who weren't already doing those interventions. So a lot of new teachers who didn't have that organization process did benefit.

To mitigate the barriers of resistance, ongoing learning opportunities to initiate RtI occurred in staff meetings for teachers new to the campus. However, for the teachers present during the implementation process, they received individualized assistance in problems of practice related to RtI. Problems were addressed with the RtI specialist during PLC meetings, which is when and how RtI strategies were learned and discussed.

Implementation

The implementation phase puts an idea, program, or set of concepts and structures into practice (Fullan, 2007). This section will concentrate on how teachers perceived the implementation process of RtI in their classroom. Implementation is expressed through three

concepts: supportive conditions for students, assessment and instructional practices, and trusting relationships.

Supportive Conditions for Students

Teachers believed that supportive conditions for students, as they relate to RtI, were a result of comprehensive and coordinated efforts in the structure of PLC. It was during these meetings that instructional supports were discussed. An example of supportive conditions for students was a practice component in lesson plans. Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, explained,

> I try to give some level of practice in class…at some point there has to be the standard demonstration and having the kids do a little formative practice, where I can see if they're getting it or not, this is beneficial to them and to me.

Teachers perceived this as an opportunity for students to practice but also for the teacher to receive feedback from students. Feedback through formative practice allowed teachers to adjust instruction, materials, or use this opportunity to re-teach.

Re-teaching, as a supportive condition, was not a new concept. Many teachers used the strategy of re-teaching on a daily basis. Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, explained how re-teaching ensured supportive conditions for her students: “I am reminded about particular students that I've had to go through the examples again and again, even if I had just done it, because many times it's just being able to see it again or a lot of times.” Mrs. Grimes, the RtI specialist, as well as all interviewed teachers agreed that formative assessment was a daily classroom practice to ensure supportive conditions for students.

Although some teachers discussed re-teaching as a supportive condition for students, Mrs. Fischer described the benefits of requiring pre-teaching tutorials. She noted that this was especially useful when she worked with English language learners (ELL).

> I require pre-teaching tutorials. If we were going to read a passage [such as] *To Kill a Mockingbird* they would have to come into my class in the morning beforehand and we read it and we talk about it…I present the tutorials as if they don't have a choice.

Pre-teaching tutorials is critical in teaching ELL. Often times pre-teaching was the first exposure for ELL to the topic and the vocabulary. Hence, pre-teaching provided students with a preview prior to the lesson, an opportunity for multiple exposures, increasing the likelihood that they would fully participate in the classroom lesson and activities. Pre-teaching as a supportive condition was also used for special education and general education students.

Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated that about 3 years ago her perception changed regarding assessment and progress monitoring. She explained her requirements for students regarding goal setting and progress monitoring. She described that students were required "to show their work like you would in math class." Students were also required to keep a folder and a chart.

> I have a chart and a folder for every student and every time we take a cumulative quiz they chart their progress in 1 of 12 areas, because the STAAR test covers all of those 12 units. They log which unit the question came from and they log the vocab [responsible for a] miss[ed] question…I then am able to open the student's folder and see that they really struggle on world wars, but they're really strong on civil rights. So when it comes to STAAR practice I am not going to review civil rights with them. They will get the packet on the world wars…So those things helped me to reflect on how students need to learn. It's a much more hands on daily indicator of what they're understanding and not understanding just like with the Bill of Rights example.

The use of the chart and folder was a supportive condition that empowered students to analyze their data, set goals, and meet their goals. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, expressed the value of student folders from a teacher's perspective. She described the writing folder:

> I think one of the difficulties of RtI and making a recommendation for a student is determining if the student is just being lazy, or if there's a capability issue…so a large amount of writing in one folder allows me to sort through and see, 'no this is really a thing [needing a change in instructional strategy]' or 'this is an issue for them [student challenge]' or 'I know what you can do now, you blew it Buster!'

Mrs. Fischer expressed her worries about the RtI process as it related to special education.

> I did have some SPED [special education] worries because his [a student's] sentences were fragments, and run-ons, and punctuation was not good, but in the last write that he did, he loved the prompt and he did really well. That's a student I would have recommended for an RtI intervention…but because his writing was cumulative, I did not…So I think that's another thing that I do that helps me make an RtI decision.

Both charting and keeping some type of folder helped students track their progress and it gave them a voice in their learning. In addition, it gave teachers data they needed to help identify deficits or learning gaps that may have existed. Teachers at Moss High School did not believe that RtI was a one size fits all type of solution. They believed each student had his or her own struggles, and they needed to provide them with supportive conditions as much as possible. The participants discussed additional supports they incorporated during the implementation process. The RtI specialist oversaw these options.

Mrs. Grimes, the RtI specialist, indicated that peer-to-peer tutoring was a technique that involved students teaching other students. Generally this was facilitated by the teacher with students, explaining their thought process and providing examples to explain a concept to another student. Mrs. Grimes shared:

> Peer-to-peer tutoring is a program that is beneficial to all students; however, it is very difficult to work it into the master schedule. This program should be facilitated by a teacher and should be in the teachers' schedule if used during the school day.

Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, described another tutoring support system for students called on-track. On-track provided ninth-grade students the opportunity to re-learn the curriculum for any nine-week period should they fail a nine-week grading period. Students who failed were required to enroll in the free on-track program. During this time, students re-learned the coursework to recover a failing nine-week grade to passing if they demonstrated mastery on

the assessments and coursework. Mrs. Elliott, who was one of the first teachers in the on-track program at Moss High School, explained:

> We call it on-track, which is our tutorial program. It meets 2 days per week from 4:15 to 5:15. So the first year we put everybody in there and then we saw these behavior problems…it just didn't work. So we weren't able to target, let alone teach what the kids needed because we were doing too much management. Then in subsequent years we worked out the management problems…and we were able to teach. Several students have received their credit this way. I know that I enjoy it and I love seeing their progress.

A more targeted type of supportive condition for students was STAAR intervention. This intervention focused on strategies and skills in data analysis geared toward taking the state assessment. Data analysis skills included students examining their past responses and with the help of the teacher or facilitator, analyzing incorrect with correct responses. The students also concentrated on test taking strategies. Mrs. Grimes stated:

> This [STAAR intervention] was first implemented because we had students that did not do well on the test, therefore to help them get ready for the test we started STAAR interventions. At first it consisted of inviting all students to come in on Saturdays and then we moved it to during the school day. Now, it is a mixture of both, depending on the teachers' availability.

STAAR interventions were not new; however, this time the interventions were implemented under the leadership of Mrs. Grimes as a supportive condition for students. In considering the most supportive conditions, the STAAR intervention was moved from after school to between the bells, affording access to students who needed it the most.

Finally, academic support as an elective course was developed and intended to meet the needs of the whole student. With an emphasis on academic success, teachers helped students develop commitment, content, competencies, and capacity. As a precursor to students being academically successful, they needed assistance with organizational and study skills as well as developing responsible habits and a growth mindset. In the review of documents academic support was described as:

1. Facilitate students checking their grades at least once a week.

    (a) Use the daily/weekly log with students to review areas of success and target areas for improvement.

    (b) NO ZEROS. Students should not have zeros in ANY class, regardless of whether the student was currently passing the class.

2. Facilitate students checking their teachers' websites and planning for upcoming quizzes and tests.

3. Facilitate goal setting, help students create a short-term study plan or a daily to-do list based off of the grade check and upcoming lesson plans.

4. Communicate with all core teachers (as a group or on an individual basis as needed) at least once a week.

5. Communicate with parent/guardian at least once a week reporting progress and needs.

6. Hold students accountable for goals set with reading, assignments, and use of their time during academic support.

Mrs. Grimes explained:

> We utilize academic support for students in need of Tier 3 remediation in multiple subject areas. We often use the District's Credit Recovery Software Odysseyware as the means for students to earn back credits. We also use academic support for Tier 2 intervention when students need additional help to be successful in their classes. Some of our academic support classes are targeted on literacy and in those sections students are reading independent reading books at the beginning of every block. Our academic supports sections targeted on literacy or math require qualified teachers who are trained to support students in those areas.

A common practice in an academic support class was for teachers to facilitate how students checked their grades and made action plans to stay caught up in their classes.

Assessment and Instructional Practices

In the 2014-15 school year, this school went through a grading policy change. Through the interviews, it was evident that it weighed heavy on the teachers and it had affected what happened in their classroom. Part of this grading policy change required secondary classroom teachers to assign grades that reflected student mastery of the TEKS or AP/IB course standards.

The use of a zero in the grade book was only used when a student did not demonstrate mastery of the content. This change in philosophy required teachers to shift their perceptions of mastery from paper and pencil, to having the student demonstrate mastery in other ways. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, stated that she used the traditional ways to monitor student progress, but she also used nontraditional ways, e.g., questioning, demonstrating, and/or a portfolio. She explained how assessment results solicited a post-conference to better determine student needs for intervention.

> Sometimes as part of the intervention process, as a reassessment, students will have to come in and have a conversation with me because once again it helps me determine if they are having an issue with the subject or are they having an issue conveying it in an essay or on a test…Because once in a while they can come in and they can talk to me and they can put an example on the board and I can see that they know what I'm asking. They just maybe have test anxiety or they can't convey it in an essay or in writing…it kind of helps determine whether it's a SPED RtI kind of issue or something we can work through in class. So those are things that I try to do.

Mrs. Rudolf, a science teacher, believed in using differentiated instruction when using nontraditional ways to monitor student progress. She stated, "Students learn differently and that it is up to the teacher to figure out what is going to work for that individual student (i.e., differentiated instruction, scaffolding, or just having another student explain it)." Now that they had a new grading policy, she explained that her assessments were ongoing and not just at the end of the unit.

Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, also incorporated differentiated instruction in her classroom by having students help each other. In her classroom, Mrs. Mathesen had her students do "a lot of projects rather than test, I think being able to apply learning in that form especially in groups is more beneficial for them because that's what they're going to encounter in the real world." Mrs. Mathesen saw this assessment strategy as another way to help her students become successful.

In reaction to the grading policy change and to help reduce the stress levels of the teachers, this school implemented an assessment center. The assessment center allowed teachers to send a test (i.e., a first-time test or retest) to the assessment center where the student could test before school, after school, or during certain blocks during the school day. The RtI specialist stated that it was "consistently being used…it's used more heavily by certain teachers, but that group of teachers use it pretty extensively…the assessment center is intricate to how teachers operate their tutorials." So teachers sent students to the assessment center to retest and instead used their tutorial time to re-teach, pre-teach, or just provide extra help to the students who came in for tutorials.

During the implementation process, Moss High School also offered credit recovery to students who failed a class. However, this school found that credit recovery did not work for all students and that it was best to identify students before they needed credit recovery. Therefore, this school instituted other layers to help students be successful. The classroom teacher oversaw these options.

Instructional practices were sometimes facilitated by the use of academic probation. A failure list was run every Friday, and any student on the list was placed on academic probation. When a student was placed on academic probation, the teacher could choose to do a teacher intervention with the student or have the student come in for mandatory tutorials. The student had one week to bring up their grade before being assigned to academic disciplinary Saturday school, where they worked on mastery of the concept. Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, explained,

> I actually tracked down Anna [RtI specialist] and I said we're following the grading policy in this district. How can we work to change some of these academic behaviors …because it wasn't an intellectual deficit for a lot of our students. And so we got together…and came up with this idea of academic probation. Every Friday we ran a

> failure list and the students on that list received primary intervention, which is a teacher intervention. We gave them a choice--either get your grade above a 65 or come to tutorials. Then my thought process changed to - do I need to refer you to something more structured like an RtI or is it something that I can intervene. All of a sudden our failure rates dropped.

Mrs. Rudolph and Mrs. Fischer described how the instructional practice of academic probation was used as a way to track failing students, offer them opportunities to learn the content, and pass. They found it effective for students who had non-academic obstacles that prevented them from accessing the curriculum.

Another instructional strategy deemed effective was learning contracts. A learning contract was a contract between the teacher, student, and parent which outlined actions that the student must complete in order to achieve academic success. Learning contracts were usually initiated after a student had failed the nine weeks, semester, or failed to complete a major or summative assignment. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, described the benefits of this instructional practice: "In my class we use learning contracts where students can go back and reassess and relearn and pass. That's the goal learning information and passing the class." Mrs. Elliott, another English teacher, explained: "I had way too many failures last quarter, more than I usually do. But I put all those kids on a learning contract and made them come to on-track."

In addition to moving students to a higher tier when they were not successful, teachers reported that they used best practices during instruction and assessment such as checking for understanding, continuous assessment, student restating understanding verbally, one-on-one instruction, and teacher observation. Teachers also scaffolded instruction for students by breaking their lessons into smaller chunks, and placing students in purposeful small groups or allowing students to group together on their own.

Trusting Relationships

During the implementation of RtI, building trusting relationships with students was a critical aspect to teachers' success with students. Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, perceived herself as a "relationship builder" who also believed in the power of teacher-student relationships. She stated, "You know the key to success is the relationship with the kid." Mrs. Elliott also used many strategies to relate to her students. She stated that she "kneels beside the student instead of standing over them," "talks to the students and asks them questions," "does not make any assumptions about the student or their family," "asks what he or she needs," and asks "about their day."

Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, also valued relationship building and described learning about the student and their family as a way to build trust.

> I would say that one thing that I try to do is…find something they like and find a way to show personal interest in it. So, it may mean, promising to go to their first football game…I have a student who loves South American food and I printed the menu and said you have to try this it's so wonderful. Just showing that interest! That's not an intervention on paper, but that relationship with that student can do so much more…And so I just think viewing all our students, especially those who need an intervention, through a human lens, as people with dignity and interest, does a lot.

Mrs. Terronez also stated that when she was growing up, she valued the relationships that she had with her teachers, and she set this as a standard of how she wanted her students to relate to her.

> I don't think that 10 years from now a student is going to think that I was a good teacher because I documented my interventions. My kids are going to think that I was a good teacher because of my relationship with them. There's just such a give and take with documenting…and the amount of time you spend with your kids going to their games, and encouraging them, going and finding them at lunch and seeing how their try-out went. And I think that the challenge is just really time and priority because so many of my students as juniors have already checked out.

Teachers viewed relationships as the hub of any effective classroom culture. They believed that when students felt their teachers cared about them, they perceived the classroom as an environment where real learning took place. Also discussed in the interviews was the relationship between the teacher, student, and parent. Within the teacher interviews, the word *parent* was used 60 times. All teachers at Moss High School perceived parental involvement to be high. Although this is not the only high school in this town, the parents in this community had taken ownership and had a sense of pride when talking about this high school. Parental involvement was not a negative issue, and in fact the parents at this school expected to be a part of their child's education.

Within Moss High School, it was an expectation and a requirement that teachers contact parents. All teachers were required to contact a parent if a student was going to fail a class, preferably a week before a reporting period. A science teacher, Mrs. Rudolf, stated that contacting parents "is a pain in the rear," but when she heard a student say they were in tutorials because their parents "grilled" them last night, then Mrs. Rudolf knew that her efforts had paid off. Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated, "Contacting parents is what a good teacher should do." All teachers who were interviewed stated they made parental contact by phone, email, or sat down with parents in order to help their students. By doing this they were able to build a trusting relationship with parents.

Teachers valued the relationship established between them, the students, and their parents, and they saw it as a conduit to leveraging parent support in the efforts teachers were making to ensure students succeed. While observing one of the PLC meetings, I noted teachers working on individual letters to parents, stating that the student had failed their class and

providing an explanation of what their student could do to demonstrate mastery (i.e., learning contract).

Institutionalization

The institutionalization or sustainability phase is reached once the innovation has been successfully implemented. Fullan (2007) clarified it as a stage where the change is developed as a continuous part of the system or it vanishes by way of a decision to get rid of it or through slow destruction. Institutionalization is a continuation of the implementation phase, and over time it becomes the new culture (Fullan, 2007; Gordon & Patterson, 2008).

Each of the five teachers interviewed had a different perception of whether the school and/or teachers had reached the institutionalization phase. They all believed that RtI was institutionalized in their classroom and did not distinguish their pedagogical practices from practices indicative of RtI. Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated the following:

> RtI is embedded in our practices…and so, when you have teachers who love their students, work on behalf of those students, intervention oftentimes it's just part of the daily grind... it's just not something we think about because, if you have a child who is polite, you don't spend more time teaching them to be polite, and so if you have a staff that is doing intervention; maybe that doesn't need to be one of the things that we focus on as much. But yeah that could be the reason that we do not separate instructional best practices from RtI.

Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, also discussed sustaining RtI in her classroom, but she mentioned she believed it was part of the culture at Moss High School:

> RtI has those things that allow students to be successful. So I think it would still sustain itself. I think that we would sustain RtI because the core of the RtI knowledge is the success of students and teachers; good teachers are always asking, 'What can I do to help these kids?' So yes it would be sustained…OK. I can only speak really about English. I think we're strong in English. I know it's a cultural thing at the school. Plus we just care about students as teachers and so that shows me that RtI is successful and will be sustained.

As PLCs were being introduced into Moss High School, the school piloted a PLC within the master schedule. Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, was a charter member of the PLC. She recalled that core instruction was the foundation of what they discussed in their PLC, and it led them to be able to sustain their PLC and RtI:

> I think the algebra 1 team kind of leads the charge for sustaining the culture of RtI . . . because we have such a well-developed PLC process. We have great collaboration there and we have been doing it the longest, so it is something that can be sustained.

Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, believed RtI was institutionalized in her classroom. She stated, "I'm going to do what I'm doing right now regardless, because it (RtI) works and it benefits the students, and that is what one of my old principals taught me to do."

Mrs. Fischer, one of the English teachers, described how the practices of RtI were considered part of best practices, what good teachers do, and how it was institutionalized in her classroom instruction. She shared:

> I am a better teacher because of best practices and RtI. I am a better teacher because I care, because I have expectations, and because I use strategies such as letting them work in small communities and because I do things that are RtI. I would take what I have learned here and use them if I went to another school.

Although all the teachers who participated in the study believed RtI integration was prevalent in their instructional practice, three out of the five teachers suggested in their interviews that RtI practices would be difficult to sustain without Mrs. Grimes, the RtI specialist. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, stated, "I think it would be gone very quickly if not the year that she left." Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, agreed with Mrs. Fischer's sentiment. Mrs. Mathesen, math teacher, noted:

> They would have to find someone else for that, because she does so much more than just that. I mean she's got kids that she helps on the side, I mean unless they found someone else I really think it would fall off. People need to be reminded…so yes if she left I really don't think that it will continue the way that it has or the way it has grown.

Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, said that sustaining RtI without Mrs. Grimes was a maybe:

> Not in the same way, not the same efficiency…and like I said the documents that she's created show you how to document and as a first year teacher I would have loved that…and so I think she's done a really good job in setting up systems, that could run without her. But I do not think they would run as smoothly, because she does a lot of things that she does not have to do, she is here all of the time. I have lots of respect for her.

Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, was the only teacher who said that if Mrs. Grimes were to leave their school, RtI would be sustained:

> I do because if you took all the icing off the top, administration being the icing...you'd still have this core group of teachers that care about the success of students and want to use anything that they can to help…so I think it would still sustain itself…because the core of the RtI knowledge is the success of students and good teachers are always asking what can I do to help these kids. So yes, it would sustain.

Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, was the only teacher who felt her entire department was effectively carrying out RtI within their PLC structure. The other teachers did not perceive a critical mass of faculty who were committed to RtI practices and felt RtI had not been institutionalized in their particular department. Mrs. Grimes, the RtI specialist, who had an aerial view of the school, believed the school was in the institutionalization phase. She shared the following: "The majority of the teachers at this school use RtI, or best practices in their classroom; they just do not call it RtI." In addition, she stated that since the school opened, "the school has already gone through a change of leadership and has been able to sustain the RtI practice."

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: What are the strengths and/or challenges of the RtI change process? The resulting second theme was PLC structure.

Within the Moss High School PLCs, teachers were driven by data and data analysis to make decisions to guide instructional planning and delivery, future assessments, and to plan appropriate interventions for struggling students. Moss High School collected and analyzed student data in their PLCs through the use of Google spreadsheets. The online spreadsheets were created by the RtI specialist to help simplify the process of finding and entering information about the student. The RtI specialist was strategic in her development of the spreadsheets. Her intent was to streamline the process by directing teachers and administrators to one central location to find data on students who required intervention. Included was a list of the strategies used, successful strategies, and general assessment information. Mrs. Grimes, the RtI specialist stated:

> We have used different types of forms, and we have found that teacher input is really valuable. The problem was that not everyone had access to it. Now that we are using online forms everyone seems to like the way it is organized, and how quickly they can log and get information. Teachers also have accountability, because all teachers are doing it and they can see who has completed the form and who has not, usually by the end of the same day.

In the past, when PLC teachers met as a department, teachers had to send an email or complete a form to get things done and did not know if another teacher had done the same thing. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, stated, “Online forms really have sped up the process.” Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, noted that “between the RtI specialist and our technology coordinator we have a lot of ways we use Google forms which helps with communication between the teacher, the interventionist, and the administration, because the forms are accessible by all parties.” Mrs. Terronez went on to say, “[instead of] sending another e-mail for every student struggling they're able to log on and quickly see the information. So that's been very helpful.”

Teachers were allowed to recommend that a student come in for tutorials. These tutorials were academic and could be before or after school. If the students did not attend the tutorials, then teachers put in an academic referral and the administrator assigned the student an academic tutorial on a Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., or until the student finished the work. Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, said, "Now she's got a Google doc that we actually go in and see what has been done for this student and make our recommendation for academic Saturday school that goes directly to the admin." Mrs. Rudolph, who was talking about students, went on to say:

> You're not turning in your work and you don't come to tutorials. So the consequence would be 4 hours of Saturday school, if you skip out on that then you get 8 hours of Saturday school, if you skip on that then you get a day of ISS.

All interviewed teachers at Moss High School agreed that PLCs were great and added value to the team and school. While analyzing the data, PLC was a theme that emerged; it emerged as both a challenge and a success. Within their current schedule, teachers were able to meet as a department or common team, but it was rare that they met as a horizontal or cross-curricular team, thus posing a challenge. Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated:

> So I have reached out to other teachers but it's more organic – what works with this kid. We don't really have a lot of cross-curricular meetings, instead we have department meetings and because this is high school, the history department or any department doesn't share the same kids. So there has not been as much collaboration as there could be.

When talking about cross-curricular planning, two teachers compared it to the middle school team philosophy where PLC teams consisted of all core teachers, all students were placed on a team, and the team met on a regular basis. Two other teachers compared it to just being a high school teacher; "we don't share kids," meaning that in high school, a student generally takes one English, one math, one history, and one science class. If teachers were meeting as a math

department, then the student only had one math class and no other teacher in the math department would have that student. This of course was different if the student was repeating a class. Nevertheless, Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated that last year she tried to start a new initiative of working with another teacher outside of her department who may have taught some of the same students she was teaching. She stated the following:

> So I was working with the English teacher who was teaching a lot of similar students and so we discussed that maybe I would teach the history unit of the 1920s while she taught *The Great Gatsby* and it would help reinforce what the students are learning.

Mrs. Terronez stated that this worked for that one unit, but they were not able to sustain it because of lack of planning time. This was a big challenge for high school teachers who wanted to help their students but were not given PLC time within the day to collaborate with other teachers who taught the same student(s). Most teachers did not want to plan with others outside of the school day, so this was a problem within the master schedule.

Mrs. Grimes, the RtI specialist, tried to be at all of the common planning PLCs within the core subjects of English, math, science, and social studies. When she was there, she was able to listen to the teachers' questions and help them with strategies for struggling students. Her involvement in the various content areas gave her a holistic view of the instructional practices across grade levels and subject areas. She spoke about her role in the PLC:

> Over the years its shifted so that I'm spending more time with teachers in PLCs and really thinking through best instructional practices from the get go…So currently our target day is Tuesday and Wednesday and there is scheduled time for English 1, 2, 3, 4, algebra, geometry, biology, and chemistry. We provide them with subs and we switch off different people for different blocks…so the instructional leadership team does their best to be in the PLC…however I'm probably at more of them, kind of like the consistency piece of trying to be aware of what's happening across campus.

An example for the above schedule would require all teachers to meet in their PLC for half of a day (2.25 hours). All English 1 teachers would meet during blocks A1 and A2;

therefore, their classes would need a sub. During the second half of the day, the geometry teachers would meet in their PLC during blocks A4 and A5. During their meeting time, subs would cover their classes (see Table 2). The next day, a different set of teachers would meet in PLCs. This way, each subject area would have an extended amount of time to plan.

Table 2

Common Planning Day with Shared Subs

A/B 1st	A2	A3	A4	A/B 5th
English 1 Common Plan	English 1 Common Plan			
Subs for English 1				
			Geometry Common Plan	Geometry Common Plan
			Subs for Geometry	

Mrs. Grimes described the essential questions that guided the PLC. The questions were from the book *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006). Mrs. Grimes described the structure of the PLC:

> So we're using four questions to guide us. So what do we want students to know? How are we going to know that they've learned it? What will we do when students don't get it? What will we do when students get it quickly? And so when I go into the PLC we try to unpack for an upcoming unit, like what are the essentials that you want students to learn, what do we mean when we say x, y, z…it's kind of a shared understanding of what we're trying to have kids do. We have different groups in different spots on this journey.

When teachers used the four guiding questions in their PLC, they concentrated on the analysis of assessment data, which they used to adjust their instructional strategies. They also deliberated on what they would do when a student did not get it. Their deliberations included differentiated instruction, small group work, one-on-one questions, and possibly re-teaching.

Mrs. Elliot, an English teacher, stated, “We want to able to look at those kids and figure out okay what kind of things do we need to do, or what kind of strategies are we going to use that are going to move students forward.” Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated:

> I think documentation is one of our strengths and I think this past year, the use of data has been one of our strengths, or at least the desire to grow in our use of data has been one of the strengths. And I know it's something that we have been talking about in PLCs as well. With looking at what we're teaching and how we're teaching it to see why we're getting the data that we do.

In their PLC, they also talked with one another about a unit and asked questions about the common summative assessments which were just given or a common summative assessment that was coming up. They also used this time to create common summative or formative assessments. Many times the common assessment was created by one teacher, and all other teachers added or subtracted what they wanted to see in the test. This was generally done through backwards design, starting with the end assessment and working back up to the beginning assessment. This way, the teachers knew what they wanted the students to know. Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, stated:

> I am very reflective and if something does not go right then, I lean on my team to see what strategies works best for them. But in our meetings, we plan, write common assessments, we talk about strategies…when I think of data I think of what we can learn from the data, and how it is best used to help all of my students, not just the ones that are failing.

While observing one of their PLCs, I was able to witness a cross-curricular PLC. This PLC was for seniors who failed the first semester. The PLC was led by the counselors, and all senior teachers were required to be in attendance. They discussed what they were going to do for each student, and teachers were able to ask questions or figure out commonalities among students. They devised a plan for each individual student. All data were logged into the Google spreadsheet, and everyone could see the plan for each student.

PLC was an integral part of Moss High School's process. As with all schools, there are strengths and challenges; Moss High School was no different. Within their PLCs, they discussed online forms, essential questions, academic referrals, and formative and summative assessments. These areas were considered strengths of the PLC discussions. Horizontal and cross-curricular team planning was considered a challenge within the PLC process for Moss High School. However, having a PLC process in place was a strength of its own.

The third theme discovered was challenges and obstacles post-implementation. Two subthemes of time and seating arrangement were noted.

Time

After the implementation of RtI, teachers realized they did not have enough time during the day to accomplish all of the necessary tasks that needed to be done. The structure of the school's schedule did not leverage opportunities for teams to meet. The consensus among participants was lack of time. The word *time* was used 85 times in the interviews and therefore was considered a challenge.

Document review revealed that the school's schedule was a modified A/B day block schedule. Students attended their 1st and 5th period classes every day for 55 minutes (A and B day), but their 2nd, 3rd, and 4th block classes meet every other day for 90 minutes. This gave students a total of 8 classes. Teachers taught 6 of the 8 classes within the schedule and were given a regular conference period or a common PLC each day. Depending on which block the teacher's conference period was, it could be 90 minutes every other day or 45 minutes every day. Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, explained:

> Time is the big one. Time is huge. You know my mentor and I are guilty for spending 12 or 13 hour days here. You know I allegedly have tutorials at 8:00 so I get here 7:25 or

> 7:30 to get work done, but the kids figure that out within a week and I show up and they are at the door…I mean sitting down and running a failure report every Friday and looking at kids and seeing who needs intervention and who doesn't that takes an hour or so. And there's just not that much time in a day…and then because I have co-teach SPED classes most of my planning periods are used for ARDs. So after school I've got tutorials and before school I've got tutorials, I lose a lot of my planning periods due to ARDs…time is the big one. And that doesn't include the teaching gig.

At the inception of the RtI implementation, teachers found time to be a challenge based on the amount of time required to complete paperwork and to document the progress of struggling students. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, explained:

> I would say the only resistance stems from the amount of paperwork that it creates for us and the time. Time is definitely pretty big…Give me a couple of hours to go and talk to other teachers about my kids who are failing and to come up with new ideas to help them…so yeah that would be the most beneficial thing, time to talk to each other.

There were also challenges with the master schedule where teachers were not given a common planning time, making it difficult to plan or discuss specific students with one another. Mrs. Elliot, an English teacher, stated:

> You know they [the district] would want us to have common assessments or they would want us to have the same lesson plans laterally. But then they wouldn't give us time to plan together and that was always the criticism.

Another challenge Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, found was her time commitment and what she felt she needed to be doing for her students.

> So I think the challenge is just really priority because ultimately I want them to pass my class and of course I want them to pass the STAAR. But that's not my main focus with these students. So for me I feel like it's more of a personal struggle. Of sometimes looking good on paper to administration and having all of my things documented…that came at the cost of not working with what really matters which is loving on my kids. And so that would be the biggest personal tug of war I think I feel with some of the time commitment of doing intervention and doing it well.

A more precise time challenge was the time constraint and the inability for teachers to communicate in a timely manner with parents. Even though teachers had a conference period, at

the end of the day students took precedence. Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, was very specific and stated:

> Calling parents is one thing, having the time to do so is another…during my conference I have students that come in to get help…so parent phone calls are usually done at the very end of my day or when I get home.

My interview with Mrs. Mathesen was planned during her conference time, with the intention of an uninterrupted interview. When I arrived, she had students in the classroom working on assignments. When I asked her about the students, she indicated that she did not want to turn them away if they were willing to come in and work. We had several interruptions, but she saw this as the right thing to do. Mrs. Mathesen was a teacher who did not mind giving up her conference period for her students. By allowing her students to come in during her conference period, she sacrificed the time to get other things done (i.e., calling parents, grading, and writing lesson plans). This was just one sacrifice that teachers, in general, made to help their students at Moss.

Lastly, teachers found that lack of time hampered teacher effectiveness individually and collectively. They all agreed that time to collaborate would serve everyone well when they could review student data, work samples, and problem solve on instructional decisions. Mrs. Elliot, an English teacher, explained:

> We want to look at those kids and figure out okay what kind of things do we need to do or what kind of strategies are we going use that are going to move students forward as readers and writers and not looking just at our lowest kids we're looking at our highest kids too. So that ability and time to be able to plan as a grade level team would be instrumental in our success.

Seating Arrangement

Although seating arrangement was not something I was looking for, it was something all

teachers discussed, and it seemed to be an integral part of their day-to-day planning. An average classroom size was about 900 square feet. At Moss High School the classroom sizes were average, but each classroom had a built-in teacher desk, two computer stations, and storage. According to TEA (2016-2017), the classroom average was about 24.54 students per class, but the reality was teachers set up their seating by the largest amount of students in a class. So if the teacher's largest class was 32, then the classroom was set up for 32 students.

Placing students in small groups should be very focused, explicit, and purposeful, but can be an obstacle if the teacher does not have a plan. By purposefully grouping students, teachers were able to target very specific needs. Although small groups are best used in Tier 2 of the RtI model, teachers at Moss High School integrated them into their daily routine.

All teachers agreed that where students sit was a contributing factor to success, but how they arranged their classroom could be an obstacle. Mrs. Elliott, Mrs. Fischer, Mrs. Mathesen, and Mrs. Terronez allowed their students to select their own seats; however, it was important to note that these four teachers also grouped their students. For instance, Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, was very specific and stated she placed her classroom in "8 groups of 4." Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, who taught a majority of ESL students, stated the following:

> I allow my students to choose their seats unless they become a problem. They usually match themselves up with students that they have worked with in the past, or they sit with someone that they are comfortable with, and during class they can lean over and say what does she mean, and I don't mind that whispering goes on between certain students because I know what's happening.

Mrs. Mathesen, a math teacher, also commented on students being in groups, stating:

> I like keeping them in the groups because I don't think you learn well in isolation. That is probably one of my biggest teaching strategies is just being socialized. I like for them to think through problems as a group. And obviously if the groups are not working out then I change the groups. That's pretty frequent especially in regular classes. I try to do a lot of projects rather than tests because I think being able to apply learning in that form

> especially in groups is more beneficial for them because that's what they're going to encounter in the real world.

Rewards were another way Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, used her seating chart:

> I try to read the culture of each class and reward them with what I can tell they value. Right now, all my classes have free seating charts, because that is what they value. I've found that to be more effective than constantly taking things away. I try to add things back, things that make them feel successful and small things so that they can succeed in terms of the course.

Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, was the only teacher who stated that due to lack of time, she assigned her students their seat. However, she also stressed that it was done with intentionality.

Even though classroom size was an obstacle, where a student sat was very important to their success in a class and to the overall RtI process. All teachers agreed they do different things with their seating charts throughout the year, but if it did not work, they mixed it up.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What specific actions facilitated or hindered their success in institutionalizing the RtI process? The resulting fourth theme was role of the RtI specialist.

The final theme was the role of the RtI specialist and how she impacted RtI and individual teachers. All five teachers stated in one way or another that it would be very difficult to have an RtI program of this caliber if it were not for Mrs. Grimes, the RtI specialist. Although Mrs. Grimes was not an administrator, the teachers acknowledged her as the person in charge of RtI. Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated, “Anna is the wizard behind the curtain and so many things that we don’t realize even in just seeing trends across people’s classes.” Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, stated, “I think the biggest strength is the group effort, that when we have strong leadership like Mrs. Grimes we can’t go wrong.”

Teachers relied on Mrs. Grimes to answer questions about individual students' academic progress. They saw her as invested in the students, and teachers were confident in her familiarity with all students. Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, explained:

> [During a hallway conversation] she knew exactly who I was talking about. She worked with him [a student] his freshman year and she knew that he struggled in English and history…in that one conversation she gave me so much information about him.

Mrs. Grimes generally had a good understanding of the students' needs because she had studied the data, and many times she had worked with the students in past years. If a student was new, then she contacted the previous school or parent for additional information. Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, recalled:

> Mrs. Grimes is amazing and she's always available to help. She can give specific information on a kid…it is just always in her brain. She doesn't have to look stuff up. She knows the history of the kid. She's a great asset.

When teachers had questions about the RtI process or RtI procedures, they went to Mrs. Grimes. Mrs. Mathesen stated:

> I don't know if I'd be able to keep up with everything if not for her [Mrs. Grimes]…just the fact that it's being taken care of, organization wise, on her end to kind of help us with that piece takes a lot of time and it relieves us of that burden.

The teachers found Mrs. Grimes to be a valuable resource for information and the glue that held the PLC and RtI structures in place. They viewed her as the one who kept a focus on the greater vision, who established the expectations and monitored them. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, stated:

> Yes, I would say that Anna has walked us through the process of what should happen, and definitely has laid the expectation of what she envisions. We have been taught about the process and procedures and how to fill out the form and what the expectation is of us.

Mrs. Grimes was also in charge of helping teachers with instructional strategies. She helped teachers figure out what might work best for specific students. Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, stated:

> In every class there's at least four or five [students] that need an intervention, and that does not include the inclusion or ESL kids that I teach…so I can't do it all on my own…so the [RtI] program or [RtI] strategies really helps make students successful…the [RtI] intervention process helps me be successful and do better for my kids.

Mrs. Fischer, another English teacher, spoke about the use of instructional strategies to help her students and communication efforts with parents. She stated:

> I break my lessons into smaller chunks. I assess in more ways than I used to and I re-teach more. I also do things like put in zero weighted grades as a communication tool with parents [so they know students are] not doing the reading. So when the parent sees a bad grade on the test, it's because they haven't done the work leading up to it. So it's more of a communication tool for them. And it also helps me see progress or not. I can also get the answers to certain questions. Are they reading, when they do read is it helping their test grade. It gives me information as well.

Mrs. Fischer spoke about Mrs. Grimes' work ethic and how she was quick to provide them with resources. She explained:

> I don't know how Anna [RtI specialist] does her job tirelessly. I mean and not only does she do her job, but she will come to our meetings and hear something that one of us says…we wish we had help with this or if we could figure out how to make this work…the next day Anna says here are some thoughts or resources that I found for you, or here's an article that I found; I hope this helps. It's never done in a mean sort of way. It's done in a way to let me know what I can do or how I can help. Anna should be an administrator.

Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, discussed the type of support she needed from Mrs. Grimes, when students were not doing what they should and when she felt she was working harder than the student. She stated:

> I have a classroom of 32 students and in one class I got 33 and 14 students specifically on service plans not counting 504 or ELLs. I need help. I've got students in there that are either engaging in this academic probation requirement or they are following through with the consequences for not engaging. They're still not successful and I have differentiated instruction and I've reached out to the parents. I've done everything to

> engage them. That's where I'm looking for that support….Mrs. Grimes and admin offer me that.

Mrs. Rudolph also shared about some of the obstacles post-implementation at Moss High School and discussed how Mrs. Grimes served as a sounding board when teachers encountered obstacles.

> There have been several different protocols that we follow. It's kind of metamorphosed as the needs arise. Basically when we identify students who can benefit from direct intervention and depending upon the program and depending on what their academic needs are for example or do they just need extra tutorials. Do they need a parent teacher conference? Do they need Tier 1, Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention? So we kind of go through the thought process before making a decision.

Mrs. Elliott shared how Mrs. Grimes was seen as an accountability partner to keep the focus on students and the RtI strategies needed to aid in their success.

> They [administration] expect us to know what strategies we're going to use, and what those students need, and how we're going to help them. There is that expectation. And that's what I appreciate because that's where I need accountability as a teacher. I need Mrs. Grimes to say okay what are you going to do? What's your plan if they don't read the book? What's your plan if they're not able to do this?

Accountability was also present in the documentation of students' needs and interventions. Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, stated:

> So we don't have to figure out who they [the students] are and look through our list of 150 kids. She [Mrs. Grimes] already has those names in the Google form and even has their STAAR scores. This makes it easier on us.

Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated:

> The documents that she's [Mrs. Grimes] created show you how to document and as a first year teacher I would have loved that…and so I think she's done a really good job in setting up systems, that could run without her. But I do not think they would run as smoothly in a lot of ways because she does a lot of things that she does not have to do, she is here all of the time. I have lots of respect for her.

Through her experience, Mrs. Grimes learned that teachers do not want to fill out another form. Mrs. Grimes stated, "So I can still remember being a classroom teacher having to fill out

forms and I'm like why am I filling out this form. Because nothing is going to happen with this form." Mrs. Grimes realized that they wanted the information they put into the forms to actually be used. Mrs. Grimes made the process easier by gathering the information that was already in digital format and distributing it to the teachers to make things easier. In the end, she still obtained the information she needed and that administrators wanted. Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher, stated:

> We just need to put what kind of intervention they need. Is it a specific teaching strategy, do they need to come in for tutorials, do they need to be placed in on track. We complete the form so that it is specific to that student…and then we talk about our kids.

Mrs. Grimes was responsible for helping teachers use data to determine if a student was appropriately placed academically or within the RtI tiers. Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, explained:

> I think the more targeted development that we've had one on one with Mrs. Grimes where she meets with our departments individually and we look at what we're doing, look at things that we could be doing, like for example on Friday we are meeting again just as a physics department with Anna to look at failures, to look at how our interventions are working, and to look at what other avenues that she might provide.

Not only did Mrs. Grimes take on the responsibility of making sure students were appropriately placed, the teachers also assessed students as they are teaching. Mrs. Fischer, an English teacher, stated:

> I try to evaluate what's the cause and then determine what help they need from me. Then ask is that doing anything. If not, I amp up the help that they're getting or I change the help that they're getting because that's not working. And I kind of do a little mini RtI process in my own classroom.

All teachers agreed that Mrs. Grimes had set up a very strong system of support and that she had taught them sustainable practices. Mrs. Terronez, a social studies teacher, stated, "I do think that the work she's done has given us some good habits." Mrs. Elliott, an English teacher,

stated, “She's a great asset to us here at Moss and we wouldn't have the success that we have with these kids without her.”

Mrs. Grimes did not believe Moss High School has achieved this level of academic success with her leadership; instead, she “attributes it to universal best practices, an exceptional academic program for all students, and the intervention and instructional culture that is at this school.” Mrs. Rudolph, a science teacher, did not believe that Moss High School was a perfect model, but she stated:

> I don't think we're a model by any stretch, but I do think that we are doing all the right things for all the right reasons. And that we are gradually getting to the point that we can be quite pleased with the results, because I'm seeing results. I'm seeing these intervention strategies being more and more successful.

Observation of PLC meetings allowed me to evidence what Mrs. Grimes described: use of universal best practices, exceptional academic programs, and the intervention and instructional culture that is at Moss High School. However, I also saw counselors taking the lead and stepping in to help with the RtI process. In addition, I noted that teachers understood the “what and why” behind this process and did what was necessary for the students. This process seemed to be effortless for counselors and teachers.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the analysis of data regarding experiences of teachers in implementing and institutionalizing RtI. Background information was provided for the RtI specialist and each of five teachers. The conceptual framework was revisited and through triangulation of data, I identified and discussed four themes as they related to the research questions. Chapter 5 will include a discussion, findings related to the literature, conclusion,

implications and recommendations for school leaders, suggestions for further research, and a summary.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Response to intervention (RtI) was originally created to identify students with learning disabilities, address the needs of underperforming students, and avoid the over identification of students having disabilities (Carr & Bertrando, 2012). In addition, RtI was intended to provide prevention and early intervention to struggling students. According to Pascopella (2010), the RtI process has also generated a way for teachers and educational leaders to strategically identify struggling learners without requiring special education services. This educational innovation has allowed RtI to completely change the way students are instructed and monitored.

From a systemic perspective, RtI should be viewed as a way to bring structure and a common language to practices that may already exist in our schools (Windram & Bollman, 2011). According to Brown-Chidsey (2007), RtI is a data-based, systematic process that supports equitable educational access for all students. It provides administrators and teachers with ways of identifying at-risk students and provides immediate data regarding their efforts toward closing learning gaps. Systemic processes in RtI can provide high-quality, research-based instruction; frequent monitoring of learning using data; teachers working in professional learning communities (PLC) to plan how to teach, what to teach and when to teach; and a school-wide infrastructure to support all processes (Windram & Bollman, 2011).

Consequently, the interest in this study was to understand how one high school sustained or institutionalized the RtI process school wide. This final chapter begins with an introduction, followed by a discussion of the findings related to the literature, conclusions, implications for practice, future research, as well as recommendations for school leaders. The results of this study

supported responses to the following overarching question and sub-questions: How does one high school institutionalize Response to Intervention?

RQ1: How did teachers perceive their experiences as they went through the Response to Intervention (RtI) change process?

RQ2: What are the strengths and/or challenges of the RtI change process?

RQ3: What specific actions facilitated or hindered their success in institutionalizing the RtI process?

Findings Related to the Literature

The review of literature highlights that the three-tiered model is the most widely accepted RtI model in the United States (Batsche et al., 2006; Ogonosky, 2009a; Ogonosky, 2009b; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011). The literature also underscores the importance of a process when introducing new innovations, in this case RtI, into an educational system, specifically Fullan's (2007) concept of the change process – initiation, implementation, and institutionalization, and the three major forces that influence change vis-à-vis culture, resistance, and professional development. Below is a synthesis of how the themes relate directly to the scholarship.

Three-Tiered Model

The three-tiered model is the most widely accepted model in the United States, and according to the literature should be used to monitor how well students respond to evidence-based instructional interventions (Klotz & Canter, 2007; National Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.). Tier 1 is the foundation of the RtI process and involves the least intensive level of intervention. Eighty percent of all students fall into Tier 1; this is where good teaching happens, and research based instructional practices are implemented (Ogonosky, 2009a; Shapiro, n.d.). This first tier must be in place for approximately 6 to 8 weeks in order for its validity to be

measured (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In Tier 2, teachers provide supplemental research-based interventions to students who respond poorly to the general education instruction. These students receive targeted, short-term, systematic interventions that are personalized for small group participation. Those students who show improvement are moved back to Tier 1 and are closely monitored (Bradley et al., 2007; Buffum et al., 2009; Hoover & Love, 2011; Ogonosky, 2009a). In this tier, progress is monitored and assessed after another 9 to 12 weeks of Tier 2 instruction (Harlacher, n.d.; Ogonosky, 2009a). Tier 3 is designed for long-term, supplemental, intensive individual instruction, so when students do not respond to interventions in Tier 2, they are moved to Tier 3 (Buffum et al., 2009; Fuchs et al., 2010; Hoover, 2010; Hoover & Love, 2011; Ogonosky, 2009a). Generally, the intensity of the intervention will be two 30-minute sessions per day, 5 days a week, and is conducted by trained support personnel (Ogonosky, 2009a). A student can stay at Tier 3 for 9 to 12 weeks. At the end of that time period, data are used to decide if the interventions are working or if further testing for special education should be requested (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Ogonosky, 2009a). In the case of Tier 1 and Tier 2, interventions are integrated into general education instructional practices.

Theme 1 (RtI integration into instructional practices), as evidenced by the data, revealed that RtI at Moss High School involved the use of a three-tiered model assimilated with instructional interventions. However, according to Windram and Bollman (2011), the use of RtI should bring a structure of common language to practices that already exist. At Moss High School, although interventions were integrated into already existing instructional practices, there was no evidence of common language or a common description of each level of intervention, or RtI tier, as clearly delineated in the literature. Moss High School used the three-tier model, however, teachers did not have clear, concise, cohesive common language as argued by

Windram and Bollman (2011). Below are examples of common language or common vocabulary missing among the teachers at Moss:

1. Diagnostic assessment – Diagnostic assessment practices serve to identify particular characteristics or features of an identified problem.
2. Progress monitoring – Collecting student performance data frequently using brief sensitive measures to see if classroom instruction is working.
3. Problem solving – A general term that describes any set of activities designed to eliminate the difference between *what is* and *what should be* with respect to student development.
4. Problem solving organization – Refers to how a school allocates or organizes their fiscal, institutional, and human resources to drive decision making.
5. Problem solving process – Set of steps, questions, and practices to foster data-based decision making for designing and evaluating interventions that are well matched to student needs.

The literature states that sustainable RtI systems require a shared understanding of the concepts and a shared vocabulary for discussing their implementation. This creates cohesion among the various initiatives designed to support student outcomes at a system level (Windram & Bollman, 2011). Although participants reported their work with struggling students became more intense as students regressed, they did not describe the RtI tiers of support, which intensify and become more individualized as the student moves through the tiers (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Ogonosky, 2009a, 2009b; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). This inconsistency between the literature and the practices at Moss High School were evident when the RtI instructional specialist admitted that teachers used RtI or best practices but did not call it RtI. The literature argues that teachers must ensure selected interventions are implemented with fidelity, the intervention is research based, and the intervention is effective with the targeted student(s) (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008). Because teachers were not responsible for moving

students from tier to tier, there seemed to be a disconnect in understanding the totality of the RtI process, with limited consistency and fidelity, and increased dependence on the RtI specialist.

Theme 4 (role of the RtI specialist) directly related to the implementation or lack of the three-tier model. The RtI specialist was instrumental in the progress monitoring of students as they move through the tiers at the appropriate time. She also coordinated all RtI planning and implementation, provided information and guidance to teachers and administrators, implemented and maintained services for students, directed data collection to determine program effectiveness, and trained existing and new school employees. This role was not systemic throughout the district, but rather confined to the Moss High School. Consequently, there were no written guidelines for this position. Teachers relied heavily on the guidance of the RtI specialist vis a vis training in instructional strategies and progress monitoring of students. The literature argues that all interventions should be implemented with fidelity and that interventions can range from 6 to 12 weeks, but teachers should identify the student's strengths and weaknesses, and should use data to decide if the interventions worked (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Ortiz, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Ogonosky, 2009a). According to Hall and Hord (2001), any confusion of the innovation leads to less fidelity of its original design. In other words, if teachers are unable to engage in progress monitoring and make decisions about how and when to move a student from one tier to the next, teachers are likely to veer from the original RtI design.

Change Process

Fullan (2007) offers a simple model for understanding a complex process and states that change occurs in three phases: (a) initiation; (b) implementation, and (d) institutionalization. Within the first phase of initiation, those who are leading the change generally pay close

attention to how the innovation is presented. Leaders who are implementing any type of change recognize "how well something begins affects how it ends" (Learning Forward, 2017, p. 21). Within this phase, leaders must engage educators and sell them on how this innovation will affect both them, as the educator, and their students. In addition, leaders also characterize results in terms of student achievement and adjust existing procedures to support the innovation.

The second phase of implementation is the process of putting the change into practice. Within this phase, the change is adopted and becomes more complex. The change is no longer a thought; it turns into reality. A critical part of implementation is giving constructive and supportive feedback and continuous opportunities for educators to refine their practice and improve results. It must also be noted that feedback and ongoing professional development and the use of PLCs are the essential means for developing clear and predictable understanding, desires, and practices related to the innovation. It is crucial that leaders continuously set clear and consistent expectations to minimize confusion and inconsistency, as well as promote implementation with frequency, regularity, and accuracy to produce intended results (Learning Forward, 2017).

The end-result objective of the change theory is institutionalization, the third phase of the theory. Unfortunately, institutionalization will not occur if the change has not been effectively initiated and fully implemented. Within the cycle of phases, each phase depends on the prior phase's success, and each phase requires different strategies. "Institutionalization means that the new practices are routine for everyone responsible for implementing them and that the practices lead to the intended results" (Leaning Forward, 2017, p. 19). Until that time, the change is not fully actualized.

Theme 2 (PLC structure) acknowledges the importance of PLC structure in the change process. It can provide consistency and scaffolding for the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of the RtI innovation. PLC supports the concept of teamwork highlighted by Fullan and Knight (2011). Effective professional development within a PLC not only includes content specific information, but it also includes active learning opportunities with colleagues from within the same school or district (Lee & Buxton, 2013; Mistretta, 2012). Although educators at Moss High School were always expected to plan together, PLC was not always the medium for this endeavor. PLC is critical for teachers to plan and receive professional development during the school day. It also apprises teachers on their content area, creates shared vision for student learning, provides adequate practice time to master new skills, and allows for professional collaboration (Lee & Buxton, 2013). Not having PLC from the beginning of the innovation hampers teachers' ability to take ownership during the implementation of the RtI innovation. Teachers would use this time to monitor students' responses to evidence-based instructional interventions (Klotz & Canter, 2007; National Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.).

Theme 4 (role of the RtI specialist) was integral to the change process. Although the RtI specialist was involved in each of the phases of change -- initiation, implementation, and institutionalization, the literature argues for the involvement of the principal, the leadership team, 'implementers' and a sound vision and purpose during the initiation phase.

1. A moral imperative should guide the *principal* to ensure that all students receive the best education possible (Fullan, 2011).
2. The *principal* and the leadership team will need to create a vision for how it will address the identified need (Russell et al., 2011).
3. The *principal* will need to constantly measure the readiness of the school to accept and embrace the forthcoming changes (Ely, 1990; Reeves, 2009).

4. As Fullan (1991) stated, “Change is difficult,” therefore, the implementation phase will not be any easier; it will be complex and will require a level of expertise on the part of the *principal* and implementers.

5. Research suggests that in order to build the capacity of the teachers, the *principal* needs to provide relevant professional development and then provide continual and intense support (Aitken & Aitken, 2008; Bryk, 2010; Popp, 2012).

6. The *principal* is responsible for keeping the vision in the forefront of the minds of the stakeholders, and for keeping staff inspired and focused on the end goal (Morrison, 2013).

7. The *principal* must be 100% committed to the change initiative and its intended purposes (Seo et al., 2012).

8. Although many factors contribute to the institutionalization and sustainability of the change initiative, it is vital that the *principal* maintain the vision and purpose of the initiation (Bryk, 2010; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013).

According to Maxwell (2007), leadership is defined as influence – nothing more and nothing less. Also, as evidenced in the itemized literature above, principal leadership is critical in the change process and could have mitigated missteps in implementation.

Three Major Forces that Influence Change

Any educational leader who wants to implement change will encounter forces that will positively or negatively impact the process. Change is difficult, and the educational leader who takes on an initiative will need to know the ins and outs of the school’s culture, why teachers resist change, and how professional development impacts the initiative. The three major forces that influence the implementation of change are culture, resistance, and professional development.

School culture and its impact on achievement have been studied for decades (Cohen et al., 2009; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Hoy, 2017). There is substantial research that supports the argument that in order for successful transformation to occur, practitioners must establish a

culture of change (Ancess, 2000; Hampel, 1999; Hargreaves, 1997; Hollins, 1996; Sarason, 1996). Assessing the culture of a school is a long and complex process, but the culture of the school needs to be diagnosed and understood before meaningful change can take place (Hall, 2013; Kruse & Louis, 2009). In order for a principal to institute sustainable change, the principal must understand the school's culture (Connolly et al., 2011).

Berman and McLaughlin (1974) explained that the organizational perspective on planned change contends that resistance to change persists after a decision to adopt is made, continuing to exert influence throughout the process of adaptation and implementation. Educators leading change need to plan for and expect resistance early on and throughout the initial phase of the process (Harris, 2011). Many times teachers believe that if they ignore or avoid the change initiative long enough that it will go away, or the principal will move on before requiring them to do the work of implementation (Bergmann & Brough, 2007).

When it comes to successful teacher adoption of school reform, quality professional development is important (Frank et al., 2011; Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Johnson et al., 2010; White et al., 2012). Professional development provides teachers with updates about their content area, creates a shared vision for student learning, gives teachers adequate practice time to master new skills, and allows for opportunities for professional collaboration (Lee & Buxton, 2013). Researchers have found that quality professional development progresses over time and is ongoing (Honey & Graham, 2012; Shymansky et al., 2013; White et al., 2012). Professional development is all about change, so whether change is voluntary or mandated, researchers have recognized that teachers will ultimately determine to what extent and in what way they want to change and how the change will be implemented (Beck et al., 2000; Richardson & Placier, 2001).

This case demonstrated that the RtI specialist, an informal leader, can influence change, help shape the culture, reduce opportunities for resistance, and provide structure for professional development through professional learning communities that build community and a vested interest in the innovation. Connolly et al. (2011) stated that in order for a person to institute sustainable change, the person must understand the school's culture. This research demonstrates that informal leaders, who have been entrenched and understand the school's culture for a number of years, can serve as a force that influences change. Some of the ways that informal leadership in this study reduced resistance was through providing teachers with professional development, which provided a space for them to exercise their voice by expressing concerns and asking questions. According to Bergmann and Brough (2007), there are several reasons to avoid or resist change, but most correlate to maintaining the existing state of the school. In this case, teachers saw the RtI specialist as one of them since she was a long time staff member and had built long lasting relationships with the teachers. She was seen as walking through the journey with them, even though she was tasked with the responsibility of professional development. Guskey (1986) stated that high quality professional development is a significant component for improving education, and the purpose for professional development is to facilitate teacher change, specifically a change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes. The professional development, and the leadership of a non-formal leader, offered credibility to this innovation.

Lastly, challenges and obstacles post-implementation involved time for collaboration and seating arrangement space for adequate small group instruction. Folger and Skarlicki (1999) defined resistance as "employee behavior that seeks to challenge, disrupt, or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations" (p. 36). Various reasons have been identified for why teachers resist change: (a) "inadequate professional development" (Dever & Lash, 2013, p.

12), (b) “we have always done it this way and it has worked so why change” (Gordon & Patterson, 2008, p. 23), (c) “concerns over student needs” (Danielowich, 2012, p. 106), (d) “to protect against emotional pain” (James & Jones, 2008, p. 3), (e) “a lack of trust in the initiative or those leading the change” (Kearney & Smith, 2010, p. 11), and (f) “change causes a sense of insecurity” (Winter & McEachern, 2001, p. 682). The literature argues and this case supports the fact that teachers feel they do not have enough time to manage one more thing, which could cause resistance. Although the RtI specialist is mitigating this challenge, it has proven to be to the detriment of teachers taking full ownership and responsibility of the process.

Although a logistical concern, seating assignment and space in classrooms at times hampered opportunities for small group instruction. This is critical for teachers to provide focused, explicit, and purposeful instruction. This could cause resistance to implementing much needed interventions; however, with the use of professional development, teachers devised solutions to overcome the space and seating challenges. The research contends that practitioners must establish a culture of change, even in the logistical aspects, in order for successful transformation to occur (Ancess, 2000; Hampel, 1999; Hargreaves, 1999; Hollins, 1996; Sarason, 1996).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to inform educators about sustaining promising research-based interventions in RtI used at the secondary level, and to understand how one high school is able to sustain the RtI process school wide. The study was conducted using a qualitative case study research design. Because of the small sample size, the case study research is not regarded as generalizable to other settings; however, case study research does offer opportunities for

exploration and understanding of complex issues (Zainal, 2007). Based on the findings, the following conclusions were derived:

1. Moss High School had an RtI specialist who analyzed the data, placed students in appropriate tiers, and developed a system to track their progress. Teachers relied heavily on the RtI specialist. All teachers used research-based practices in their classroom, learned through professional development. The need for the RtI specialist was not in the classroom, but rather for the development of school wide structures to establish processes for progress monitoring. The study revealed a lack of administrative presence throughout the initiation process of RtI, which hampered an effective change process affording teachers the opportunity to take full ownership of the process.

2. Although teachers met on a regular basis, they did not meet in cross-curricular teams, but rather as a department. As a department, they joined in common planning, the development and analysis of assessments, and decisions regarding instructional strategies to implement the RtI innovation. However, severely hampered was the discussion of struggling students since the students were not shared by all the teachers within the department. Teachers could only talk about the students in generalities. If teachers were organized in cross-curricular teams, they could be more explicit on strategies and approaches when discussing students.

3. A three-tiered model was used by Moss High School. However, teachers were not exposed to the entire model of progress monitoring or which tier their students were on. Their level of involvement included decisions regarding individual interventions for the student(s). In depth understanding on instructional strategy based on level of intervention was absent.

4. The word *Time* was used 85 times in the interviews. Teachers expressed a lack of time to accomplish necessary tasks. The school's schedule prohibited opportunities for team

meetings, completion of paperwork to document the progress of students, and communication with parents in a timely manner. The lack of time hampered their effectiveness individually and collectively.

Implications for Practice

Findings and recommendations may be transferable to other settings; however, as a single case study, the research may not be generalizable. Implications in this section may be helpful for school and district leaders.

Based on the findings of this study,

- Districts and schools should have a common vision for RtI.
- Districts should work collaboratively with their schools to develop guidelines that provide a roadmap for planning, implementing, and sustaining an innovation.
- Leadership should begin with the principal and include formal and informal leaders to ensure a total commitment at a very personal level on the part of all educators.
- These formal and informal leaders should ensure that Response to Intervention is integrated within PLC's, such that PLCs offer a way to:
    - provide professional development in the RtI structure and processes
    - ensure fidelity in the work that should occur during each tier
    - promote a culture which places students first
- Finally, effective RtI leadership focuses on data-informed decisions which build trust with all stakeholders, including parents and students.

Suggestions for Further Research

The findings from the study could be used as the basis for action research in high schools that are looking to sustain RtI. Action research could include a district comparison of RtI versus

MTSS and its effect on student learning, and the effect of RtI on secondary students who successfully complete Tier 3. Further study is encouraged of other secondary schools that have implemented and sustained RtI. Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a follow-up study in 5 to 7 years, at this same high school, in order to determine if the school was able to sustain the innovation of RtI.

For a more comprehensive view, the viewpoint of students and how they view RtI would be beneficial. Although this was not a quantitative study, it would be interesting for future researchers to be able to quantify the number of students who received RtI at the secondary level and compare it to graduation and dropout rates and how it affects SPED numbers.

Summary

Limited research exists on RtI at the secondary level, so this study was prepared to deepen the understanding of secondary RtI and to add to the literature on RtI at the secondary level. In this study, I examined the institutionalized RtI systems in place at Moss High School. I wanted to understand how one secondary school addressed the complexity and uniqueness of the secondary environment while sustaining RtI practices. The participants in this study shared several research-based practices that they believed assisted struggling students to become academically successful.

The findings regarding RtI practices and implementation were supported by researchers whose works were analyzed in the literature review (Fuchs et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001, Ogonosky, 2009). I conclude that understanding the phases of change, the three major forces which influenced change, and a clear, well thought out plan are vital components to success.

I have been a professional educator for 21 years; yet, I have always considered myself a student. Throughout my observations in public education, I have witnessed various student needs and how the evolution and quality of research has helped us to help students. Our work as educators must be driven by the knowledge that our collaborative efforts (district, school, and classroom) determine the success of our students. Leadership and the quality of it determines how successfully we implement the structures of RtI and PLC. After all – we are striving for one goal – to help students.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Notice

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Response to Intervention (RtI) And Promising practices: What Works at the Secondary Level

Student Investigator: Regena Little, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Teacher Education and Administration. **Supervising Investigator**: Dr. Miriam Ezzani.

Purpose of the Study: This case study will explore the implementation of RtI at your school. The purpose of this study is to inform educators about sustaining promising research based interventions that are used at the secondary level. Furthermore, it will address the complexity and uniqueness of the secondary environment and how to best implement and sustain secondary RtI. This study also intends to add to the literature and deepen the understanding of RtI at the secondary level, as there is little research available.

Study Procedures: Participation in this study will involve an interview that will last approximately 60 minutes for teachers and 90 minutes for the RtI specialist. This interview will be digitally (audio only) recorded and then transcribed by Regena Little. Once transcribed, the participant will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. Participants will also be asked to share artifacts that have helped them to sustain RtI and to allow the researcher to observe RtI PLC meetings (60 minutes). The data will be used to identify best practices for RtI and to inform educators about sustaining promising research based interventions that are used at the secondary level.

All research records will be stored on the UNT campus for a period of three years past the end of the study in a locked file cabinet. In addition, all identifiable information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used for all participants. At the end of the three years the records will be shredded.

Foreseeable Risks: There are no foreseeable risks involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you; however, your participation is expected to help deepen the understanding on how other schools can sustain RtI at the secondary level.

Compensation for Participants: No compensation is provided.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: All data will be stored on the UNT campus for a period of three years past the end of the study. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Any identifiable information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used for all participants. The pseudonyms will be coded as follows: English ET1, math MT2, science ST3, and social studies SST4; the fifth teacher will also be labeled following the same format. The RtI specialist will also be assigned a label of RtI1.

The assigned label to each participant holds no value or meaning, but is a simple method to code and track participants anonymously while transcribing data.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Regena Little at [redacted] You may also contact my UNT faculty advisor Dr. Miriam Ezzani at [redacted]

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights:
Your participation confirms that you have read all of the above and that you agree to all of the following:

- Regena Little has explained the study to you and you have had an opportunity to contact her with any questions about the study. You have been informed of the possible benefits and the potential risks of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You understand you may print a copy of this form for your records.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

For the Investigator or Designee:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

_____ _____
Signature of Investigator or Designee Date

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INVITATION

Dear (RtI specialist),

My name is Regena Little, and I am a doctoral candidate for Education Leadership at the University of North Texas. I am currently in the process of completing my research project titled *Response to Intervention (RtI) and Promising practices: What Works at the Secondary Level*. This case study will explore the implementation of RtI at [redacted].

You are being contacted because you are the RtI specialist and you have been selected to participate in this RtI case study. The purpose of this study is to inform educators about sustaining promising research based interventions that are used at the secondary level. Furthermore, it will address the complexity and uniqueness of the secondary environment and how to best implement and sustain secondary RtI. This study also intends to add to the literature and deepen the understanding of RtI at the secondary level.

Data for this study will be collected through a participant interview (90 minutes), PLC meetings (60 minutes), and collection of relevant artifacts. Your time commitment will be approximately 150 minutes.

As the RtI specialist for your campus, I would also ask that you select the 5 teachers that will be participating in the study. The following criteria will be used: (1) participant must have at least 5 years of teaching experience at [redacted] H.S.; (2) participant must have 2 years of RtI implementation in the classroom; and (3) participant must teach English, math, science or social studies.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. All information collected during the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to review, and edit all transcripts before data are interpreted.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me via email as soon as a decision is made. I will then contact you to set up a face-to-face interview.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [redacted] or at [redacted]. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Regena Little

Dear (participant name),

My name is Regena Little, and I am a doctoral candidate for Education Leadership at the University of North Texas. I am currently in the process of completing my research project titled *Response to Intervention (RtI) and Promising practices: What Works at the Secondary Level*. This case study will explore the implementation of RtI at [redacted].

You are being contacted because you have been selected to participate in an RtI case study. The purpose of this study is to inform educators about sustaining promising research based interventions that are used at the secondary level. Furthermore, it will address the complexity and uniqueness of the secondary environment and how to best implement and sustain secondary RtI. This study also intends to add to the literature and deepen the understanding of RtI at the secondary level.

You were selected by your RtI specialist and because you met the following criteria: (1) participant must have at least 5 years of teaching experience at [redacted] H.S.; (2) participant must have 2 years of RtI implementation in the classroom; and (3) participant must teach English, math, science or social studies.

Data for this study will be collected through a participant interview (60 minutes), PLC meetings (60 minutes), and collection of relevant artifacts. Your time commitment will be approximately 120 minutes.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. All information collected during the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to review, and edit all transcripts before data are interpreted.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me via email as soon as a decision is made. I will then contact you to set up a face-to-face interview.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [redacted] or at [redacted] I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Regena Little

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Teacher Interview Protocol

After introductions, the researcher will review the informed consent with the participant, and then ask them to sign it. Participants will be made aware that the researcher will take field notes and that the interview will be digitally recorded. All participants will be reassured that confidentiality of the study will be maintained and that they will have the opportunity to review and make changes to their personal transcript.

1. Please describe your educational background, how many years you've taught at this school, and the certification(s) you hold?
2. Can you describe the RtI journey at this school? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
3. Can you describe the RtI implementation process in your classroom? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
4. What are your expectations for RtI implementation? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
5. What system of support has been put into place to aid with the implementation process? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
6. Can you describe professional development or training on RtI? (*Research Question 1, and 3)*
7. Please explain if there's been resistance to the implementation of RtI at this school? If yes, can you provide examples? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
8. What are some of the challenges that you encountered? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
9. What are the strengths of RtI implementation? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
10. How are you modifying teaching practices for RtI implementation? (i.e. planning, and assessment) (*Research Question 3)*
11. Can you discuss specific strategies you implement in your classroom with at-risk students? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
12. How often do you engage in teacher collaboration with your colleagues regarding students who receive RtI? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
13. If yes, how does collaboration help in the implementation of RtI? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
14. What are some of the challenges you encountered in implementing RtI from year to year? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
15. Do you feel RtI is part of the school culture? If yes, what are the indicators? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
16. What is the expectation from leadership on the use of RtI in your classroom? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
17. Do you feel that the administrators recognize your full commitment to RtI in your classroom? Please explain. (*Research Question 1 and 3)*
18. As a teacher, is there anything that you want to add or would have done differently? How about advice?

RtI Specialist Interview Protocol

After introductions, the researcher will review the informed consent with the participant, and then ask them to sign it. Participants will be made aware that the researcher will take field notes and that the interview will be digitally recorded. All participants will be reassured that confidentiality of the study will be maintained and that they will have the opportunity to review and make changes to their personal transcript.

1. Please describe your educational background, how many years you've taught at this school, the certification(s) you hold, and your job responsibility?
2. Can you describe the RtI journey at this school? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
3. What do you do for teachers that support RtI implementation? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
4. What are your expectations for RtI implementation? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
5. What system of support has been put into place to aid with the implementation process? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
6. If there was a change in leadership, do you feel that the change initiative (RtI) is deeply rooted in the culture of the school and would be sustained? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
7. How do you ensure that everyone understands RtI and why it was being implemented, and what the intended outcomes should be? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
8. Please explain if there's been resistance to the implementation of RtI at this school? If yes, can you provide examples? (*Research Question 1 and 2)*
9. How are teachers modifying teaching practices for RtI implementation? (i.e. planning, and assessment) (*Research Question 3)*
10. Can you discuss specific strategies that you require teachers to implement in their classroom with at-risk students? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
11. How often do you engage in teacher collaboration with your colleagues regarding students who receive RtI? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
12. If yes, how does collaboration help in the implementation of RtI? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
13. What are some of the challenges you encountered in implementing RtI from year to year? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
14. Do you feel RtI is part of the school culture? If yes, what are the indicators? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
15. Research suggests that it takes 3 to 5 years for any change initiative to be sustained and become a part of the culture of the school. How far along are you in sustaining RtI on this campus? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*

16. What type of data do you get back from teachers? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
17. Can you describe professional development or training for teachers on RtI? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
18. What else do you do to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
19. As you begin to implement RtI, how did you increase the skill level of the teachers? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
20. What does your professional development consist of? How to implement, how to sustain, what to do for students, how to monitor progress, how to use data? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
21. How is professional development different for new teachers? (*Research Question 1, 2, and 3)*
22. As the RtI specialist what advice can you offer other RtI coordinators/specialist and is there anything else that you would like to add?

Research Questions

RQ1: How did teachers perceive their experiences as they went through the Response to Intervention (RtI) change process?

RQ2: What are the strengths and/or challenges of the RtI change process?

RQ3: What specific actions facilitated or hindered their success in institutionalizing the RtI process?

APPENDIX D

IRB

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THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Research and Economic Development

October 19, 2017

Dr. Miriam Ezzani
Student Investigator: Regena Little
Department of Teacher Education & Administration
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 17-426

Dear Dr. Ezzani:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Responding to Intervention (RtI) and Promising Practices: What Works at the Secondary Level." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. **Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, October 19, 2017 to October 18, 2018.**

Enclosed are the consent documents with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and **use this form only** for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications. **If continuing review is not granted before April 9, 2018, IRB approval of this research expires on that date.**

Please contact The Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Chad Trulson, Ph.D.
Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board

CT:jm

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